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THE DALTONS OR THREE ROADS IN LIFE

BY

CHARLES LEVER.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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THE DALTONS

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THE DALTONS;

OR,

THREE ROADS IN LIFE.

VOL. II.

CHAPTER I.

A Midnight Reception.

It was past midnight, the Opera was just over, and the few privileged guests who were permitted to pay their visits to Lady Hester Onslow were assembling in the little drawing-room and boudoir, sacred to these exclusive receptions. Nothing could be in stronger contrast than the gorgeous splendour of the apartment and the half-dressed, careless, lounging ease of the men as they stretched themselves on the ottomans, lounged on the sofas, or puffed their cigars, alike indifferent to the place and the presence of two ladies who, dressed in the very perfection of "toilette," did the honours of the reception.

Lady Hester, who wore a small embroidered velvet cap, coquettishly set on one side of the head, and a species of velvet jacket, such as is common in Greece,

lay upon a sofa beneath a canopy of pink-silk covered with lace; a most splendidly ornamented hooka, the emerald mouth-piece of which she held in her hand, stood on a little cushion beside her; while, grouped around in every attitude that taste or caprice suggested — on chairs, on cushions, squabs, "*prie-dieux*," and other drawing-room devices of a like nature — were some half-dozen men, whose air and bearing pronounced them long habituated to all the usages of society. One stamp of feature and style pervaded all; pale, dark-eyed, black-bearded, and weary-looking, they seemed as though they were tired of a life of dissipation, and yet utterly incapable of engaging in any other.

All, born to high rank, some to large fortune, they found that no other career was open to them, except vice in one shape or other. The policy of their rulers had excluded them from every road of honourable ambition; neither as statesmen nor soldiers could they hope to win fame or glory. Their habits of life and the tone of society gave no impulse to the cultivation of science or literature. The topics discussed in their circle never by chance adverted to a book; and there they were, with heads whose development indicated all that was intellectual, with brows and foreheads that betokened every gift of mental excellence, wearing away life in the dullest imaginable routine of dissipation, their minds neglected, their hearts corrupted, enervated in body, and deprived of all energy of character; they wore, even in youth, the exhausted look of age, and bore in every lineament of their features the type of lassitude and discontent.

In the adjoining room sat Kate Dalton at a tea-

table. She was costumed — for we cannot use any milder word — in a species of "moyenâge" dress, whose length of stomacher and deep-hanging sleeves recalled the portraits of Titian's time; a small cap covered the back of her head, through an aperture in which the hair appeared, its rich auburn masses fastened by a short stiletto of gold, whose hilt and handle were studded with precious stones; a massive gold chain with a heavy cross of the same metal, was the only ornament she wore. Widely different as was the dress from that humble guise in which the reader first knew her, the internal change was even greater still; no longer the bashful, blushing girl, beaming with all the delight of a happy nature, credulous, light-hearted, and buoyant, she was now composed in feature, calm, and gentle mannered; the placid smile that moved her lips, the graceful motion of her head, her slightest gestures, her least words, all displaying a polished ease and elegance, which made even her beauty an attraction secondary to the fascination of her manner. It is true, the generous frankness of her beaming eyes was gone; she no longer met you with a look of full and fearless confidence; the cordial warmth, the fresh and buoyant sallies of her ready wit, had departed, and in their place there was a timid reserve, a cautious, shrinking delicacy, blended with a quiet, but watchful spirit of repartee, that flattered by the very degree of attention it betokened.

Perhaps our reader will not feel pleased with us for saying that she was more beautiful now than before; that, intercourse with the world, dress, manners, the tact of society, the stimulas of admiration, the assured sense of her own charms, however they may

have detracted from the moral purity of her nature, had yet invested her appearance with higher and more striking fascinations. Her walk, her curtsey, the passing motion of her hand, her attitude as she sat, were perfect studies of grace. Not a trace was left of her former manner; all was ease, pliancy, and elegance. Two persons were seated near her: one of these, our old acquaintance, George Onslow; the other was a dark, sallow-visaged man, whose age might have been anything from thirty-five to sixty, — for, while his features were marked by the hard lines of time, his figure had all the semblance of youth. By a broad blue ribbon round his neck he wore the decoration of San Nicholas, and the breast of his coat was covered with stars, crosses, and orders of half the courts of Europe. This was Prince Midchikoff, whose grandfather, having taken an active part in the assassination of the Emperor Paul, had never been reconciled to the Imperial family, and was permitted to reside in a kind of honourable banishment out of Russia; a punishment which he bore up under, it was said, with admirable fortitude. His fortune was reputed to be immense, and there was scarcely a capital of Europe in which he did not possess a residence. The character of his face was peculiar, for, while the forehead and eyes were intellectual and candid, the lower jaw and mouth revealed his Calmuck origin, an expression of intense, unrelenting cruelty being the impression at once conveyed by the thin, straight, compressed lips, and the long projecting chin, seeming even longer from the black-pointed beard he wore. There was nothing vulgar or commonplace about him; he never could have passed unobserved anywhere, and yet he

was equally far from the type of high birth. His manners were perfectly well-bred; and, although he spoke seldom, his quiet and attentive air, and his easy smile, showed he possessed the still rarer quality of listening well.

There was another figure, not exactly of this group, but at a little distance off, beside a table in a recess, on which a number of prints and drawings were scattered, and in the contemplation of which he affected to be absorbed; while, from time to time, his dark eyes flashed rapidly across to note all that went forward. He was a tall and singularly handsome man, in the dress of a priest. His hair, black and waving, covered a forehead high, massive, and well-developed; his eyes were deep-set, and around the orbits ran lines that told of long and hard study, — for the Abbé D'Esmonde was a distinguished scholar; and, as a means of withdrawing him for a season from the overtoil of reading, he had been attached temporarily as a species of Under-Secretary to the Mission of the "Nonce." In this guise he was admitted into all the society of the capital, where his polished address and gentle manner soon made him a general favourite.

Equally removed from the flippant levity of the Abbé as a class, and the gross and sensual coarseness of the "old Priest," D'Esmonde was a perfect man of the world, so far as taking a lively interest in all the great events of politics, watching eagerly the changeful features of the times, and studying acutely the characters of the leading men, at whose dictates they were modified. Its pleasures and amusements, too, he was willing to partake of moderately and unobtrusively; but he held himself far apart from all those subjects

of gossip and small talk which, in a society of lax morality, occupy so considerable a space, and in which the great dignitaries, who wear scarlet and purple-stockings, are often seen to take a lively and animated share. Some ascribed this reserve to principle; others called it hypocrisy; and some again, perhaps with more truth, deemed it the settled line of action of one who already destined himself for a high and conspicuous station, and had determined that his character should add weight and dignity to his talents.

It might have been thought that he was a singular guest to have been admitted to receptions like the present; but Jekyl, who managed everything, had invited him, on the principle, as he said, that a gourmand has a decanter of water always beside him at dinner, "not to drink, but because it looks temperate." The Abbé's presence had the same effect; and certainly his calm and dignified demeanour, his polished address, and cultivated tone, were excellent certificates of good character for the rest.

At the tea-table the conversation languished, or only went forward at intervals. Onslow's French was not fluent, and he was silent from shame. Kate felt that she ought not to take the lead; and the Prince, habitually reserved, spoke very little, and even that in the discursive, unconnected tone of a man who was always accustomed to find that any topic *he* started should be instantly adopted by the company.

The cold and steady stare with which he surveyed her would, but a short time back, have covered her face with a blush; she could not have borne unabashed the glance of searching, almost insolent meaning he

bestowed upon her; but now, whatever her heart might have felt, her features were calm and passionless; nor did she in the slightest degree show any consciousness of a manner that was costing Onslow a struggle whether to laugh at, or resent.

In one sense these two men were rivals, but each so impressed with proud contempt for the other, their rivalry was unknown to both. Kate, however, with her woman's tact, saw this, and knew well how her least smile, or slightest word, inclined the balance to this side or to that. The Prince was inveighing against the habit of wintering in Italy as one of the most capital blunders of the age.

"We forget," said he, "that, in our present civilisation, art is always first and nature second, as we see evidenced in all the results of agriculture. It is not the most fertile soil, but the highest-laboured one, which produces the best fruits. So with respect to climate, we never bear in mind, that where nature does most, man always does least."

"According to that rule, Prince, we should winter at St. Petersburg, and spend the dog-days at Calcutta," said Kate, smiling.

"So we should," replied he; "the appliances to resist heat or cold, of man's invention, are far better adapted to enjoyment than the accidental variations of climate."

"In my country," said Onslow, tartly, "men study less how to avoid the inclemencies of weather than to become indifferent to it. Hunting, shooting, and deer-stalking, are very sure methods to acquire this."

The Prince paid no attention to the remark, but turned the conversation into another channel, by asking

Kate if she had ever read Fourier's book; from this he wandered away to the characteristic differences of national music; thence to the discoveries then making in Central America; and lastly, engaged her in an animated discussion of the question of slavery. On none of these points was he deeply or even well informed, but he possessed that fluency and facility which intercourse with society confers; and as all his knowledge was derived from men, and not from books, it bore a certain stamp of originality about it that secured attention. Not, indeed, from George Onslow; he was the most bored of men. None of the topics were his topics. Of Tattersall's, the Guards' Club, the society of London, the odds on the "Derby," he could have discoursed well and pleasantly — from, what was "wrong" with the Sambucca filly, to what was not right with Lady Flutterdon's niece, he could have told you everything; but all these other themes were, in his estimation, but sheer pedantry; and, indeed, they only lacked a little knowledge — a very little would have sufficed — to be so.

"He is gone," said the Prince, with a caustic smile which revealed a plan; "gone at last."

"So, then, this was a device of yours, Prince," said she, laughing. "I really must call my cousin back, and tell him so."

"No, no," said he, seriously. "I have won my battle, let me profit by my victory. Let me speak to you on another subject." He drew his chair a little nearer to the table as he spoke, and laid his arm on it. Kate's heart beat fast and full; the colour came and went rapidly in her cheek; a vague sense of fear, of shame, and of triumphant pride were all at conflict

within her. There was but one theme in the world that could have warranted such a commencement — so serious, so grave, so purposelike. Was this, then, possible? The glittering stars — all a blaze of brilliants — that shone beside her, seemed an emblem of that high state which was now within her reach; and what a torrent of varied emotions rushed through her heart. Of home, of her father, of Nelly, of Frank, and, lastly, what thoughts of George — poor George — whom she knew loved her, and to whom, without loving, she was not altogether indifferent. "Do not be agitated, Mademoiselle," said the Prince, laying the slightest touch of his jewelled fingers on her arm; "I ask a little patience, and a little calm consideration, for what I am about to say."

"Is that really like an Irish peasant's cottage, Miss Dalton?" said the Abbé, as he held before her a drawing of one, in all the details of its most striking misery.

"Yes, perfectly — not exaggerated in the least," said she, hurriedly, blushing alike at the surprise and the interruption.

"You have no such misery, Monsieur le Prince, in Russia, I believe?" remarked the Priest, with a courteous bend of the head.

"We are well governed, Sir; and nothing displays it more palpably than that no man forgets his station," said the Prince, with an insolent *hauteur* that made Kate blush over neck and forehead, while D'Esmonde stood calm and passionless under the scarcasm.

"So I have always heard, Sir," said he, blandly. "I remember, when at Wredna —"

"You have been at Wredna?" asked the Prince, in an altered voice.

But the other, not heeding the interruption, went on.

"I remember, when at Wredna, to have heard an anecdote, which strikingly illustrates the rigid obedience yielded to power, and the condition of public opinion at the same time. A manumitted slave, who was raised to high rank and wealth by the favour of the Czar, had returned to Wredna in the capacity of Governor. A short time after his arrival, he was tormented by applications and letters from a woman in great poverty, who asserted that she was his mother. Fedeorovna, of course, in secret proved the truth of her assertion, but the only answer she received was a significant caution to be silent, and not appeal to a relationship which could only prove offensive. Perhaps, incredulous of the authentic character of so cruel a reply — perhaps, stung to angry indignation by it, she carried the humble basket of fruit and vegetables that she hawked for a livelihood before the door of the great mansion where her son resided, but, instead of advertising her wares, as is customary in these Muscovite markets, by some picture of a saint or some holy inscription, she carried a little placard, with the inscription — 'The Mother of Alexovitch,' the name of the Governor. A crowd soon gathered around this singular booth, heralded by so strange an announcement, and as speedily the police resorted to the spot, and carried the offender before the Judge. The defence was the simple one — that she had merely averred the truth. I need not weary you with the mockery of investigation that

followed, the result is all I need tell. This woman was knouted and sent away to Siberia. So much for the Governor. As for the governed, they were enthusiastic in praise of his justice and clemency; for he might have ordered her to be beheaded."

"Do you tell the story as a fact, Sir?" said the Prince, whose dark cheek became almost green in its sallowness as he spoke.

"I tell it distinctly as a fact. The Papa who received the woman's confession repeated the tale on his own deathbed, from whence it reached me."

"Priests can be liars, whether Greek or Roman," said the Prince, in a voice almost suffocated with passion; and then, suddenly checking the course of his anger, he turned to Kate with a sickly smile, and said — "Mademoiselle will pardon a rudeness in her presence which nothing short of so gross a calumny could have elicited."

"I will furnish you with all the names to-morrow, Monsieur le Prince," said D'Esmonde, in a whisper; and sauntered away into the adjoining room.

"You look pale, Miss Dalton," said the Prince.

"That shocking story —"

"Which of course you don't believe."

"The Abbé D'Esmonde I have always heard to be a person of strict veracity and of extreme caution."

"Be careful of him, Miss Dalton. It is not without good reason that I say this."

There was a degree of solemnity in the way he uttered these words that made Kate thoughtful and serious. Unaccustomed to see in society anything but

features of pleasure and amusement, she was suddenly awakened to the conviction that its calm waters covered rocks and quicksands as perilous as stormier seas. Could people so full of amiabilities be dangerous acquaintances? — was there poison in this charmed cup? — was the doubt which sprung to her mind; but she had not time for there inquiry, as the Prince offered her his arm to the supper-room.

CHAPTER II.

A "Levanter."

In our penal settlements, nothing is more common than to find the places of honour and distinction filled by men who were once convicts, and who may date the favourable turn of their fortune to the day of their having transgressed the law! so in certain continental cities are individuals to be found occupying conspicuous stations and enjoying a large share of influence, whose misdeeds at home first made them exiles, and who, leaving England in shame, are received abroad with honour. There is this difference between the two cases: for while the convict owes all his future advancement to his own efforts at reformation, the absentee obtains his "brevet" of character by the simple fact of his extradition. He shakes off his rascalities as he does his rheumatism, when he quits the foggy climate of England and emerges, spotless and without stain, upon the shores of Ostend or Boulogne.

To do this, however, he must not bear a plebeian name, nor pertain to the undistinguishable herd of vulgar folk. He must belong to some family of mark and note, with Peers for his uncles and Peeresses for cousins; nor is he always safe if he himself be not a member of an hereditary legislature. We have been led to these reflections by having to chronicle the arrival in Florence of Lord Norwood; a vague and confused murmur of his having done something, people

knew not what, in England having preceded him. Some called him poor "Norwood," and expressed sorrow for him; others said he was a capital fellow, up to everything, and that they were delighted at his coming. A few, of very tender and languishing virtue themselves, wondered if they ought to meet him as before, but the prevailing impression was charitable. The affair at Graham's might have been exaggerated, the Newmarket business was possibly a mistake. "Any man might owe money, and not be able to pay it," was a sentiment pretty generally repeated and as generally believed, and, in fact, if to be tried by one's peers be an English privilege, the noble Viscount here enjoyed it at the hands of a jury unimpeachable on the score of equality.

We are far from suggesting that Norwood's character as a "shot" had any concern with this mild verdict; but, certain it is, his merits in this capacity were frequently remembered, and always with honourable mention.

"No man plays *écarté* better!" said Haggerstone, while as yet the Viscount's arrival was unknown; and, as he discussed the rumours upon him before a group of listening Englishmen, at the door of the "Club," "No man plays *écarté* better — nor with better luck!" added he, in a chuckle that was intended to convey a meaning beyond the mere words.

"Has he been a large winner, then?" asked one of the bystanders respectfully, looking to the Colonel for information — for, in a certain set, he was regarded as the most thoroughly conversant man with all the faults and follies of high life.

"No man wins invariably, Sir, except Brooke Morris,

perhaps," replied he, always happy at the opportunity to quote the name of a man of fashion in a tone of familiarity.

"That was the Mo — Mo — Morris that ruined Hopeton, wasn't it?" broke in Purvis, quite forgetting that the individual he addressed was reported to have a share in the transaction. Haggerstone, however, did not deign a reply, but puffed his cigar in perfect contempt of his questioner.

"Who is this coming up here?" said one; "he looks like a new arrival. He is English, certainly, — that frock has a London cut — there 's no mistaking."

"By Jove! it 's Norwood," cried Haggerstone, edging away, as he spoke, from the group. Meanwhile the noble Viscount, a well-dressed, well-whiskered man, of about thirty, came leisurely forward, and touching his hat familiarly, said,

"Ha! you here, Haggerstone, — what is Florence doing?"

"Pretty much as it always did, my Lord. I don't think its morals have improved since you knew it a few years ago."

"Or you wouldn't be here, Haggy — eh?" said the Viscount, laughing at his own joke. "Not suit your book, if it took a virtuous turn — eh?"

"I plead guilty, my Lord. I believe I do like to shoot folly as it flies."

"Ah, yes! And I've seen you taking a sitting shot at it too, Haggy," said the other, with a heartier laugh, which, despite of the Colonel's efforts not to feel, brought a crimson flush to his cheek.

"Is there any play going on, Haggy?"

"Nothing that you would call play, my Lord; a

little whist for Nap. points, a little *écarté*, a little piquet, and, now and then, we have a round game at Sabloukoff's."

"Poor old fellow! and he 's alive still? And where 's the Jariominski?"

"Gone back to Russia."

"And Marietti?"

"In Saint Angelo, I believe."

"And that little Frenchman — what was his name? — his father was a Marshal of the Empire."

"D'Acosta."

"The same. Where is he?"

"Shot himself this spring."

"Pretty girl, his sister. What became of her?"

"Some one told me that she had become a Sœur de Charité."

"What a pity. So they 're all broken up, I see."

"Completely so."

"Then what have you got in their place?"

"Nothing fast, my Lord, except, perhaps, your friends the Onslows."

"Yes; they 're going it, I hear. Isn't there a rich niece, or cousin, or something of that sort with them?"

"They 've got a prettish girl, called Dalton; but as to her being rich, I think it very unlikely, seeing that her family are living in Germany in a state of the very closest poverty."

"And Master George, how does he carry on the war?" said the Viscount, who seemed quite heedless of the other's correction.

"He plays a little peddling *écarté* now and then;

but you can see that he has burned his fingers, and dreads the fire. They say he 's in love with the Dalton girl."

"Of course he is, if they live in the same house; and he 's just the kind of fool to marry her, too. Who 's that little fellow, listening to us?"

"Purvis, my Lord; don't you remember him? He 's one of the Ricketts' set."

"To be sure I do. How are you, Purvis? You look so young and so fresh, I could not persuade myself it could be my old acquaintance."

"I 've taken to homœ — homœ — homœ — homœ —" Here he opened his mouth wide, and gasped till he grew black in the face.

"What 's the word? Give it him, Haggy. It 's all up with him," said the Viscount.

"Homœopathy — eh?"

"Just so. Homœ — homœ —"

"Confound it, man, can't you be satisfied; when you 're once over the fence you needn't go back to leap it. And how is the dear — what 's her name — Agathe? — no, Zoe — how is she?"

"Quite well, my Lord, and would be cha — cha — cha — rmed to see you."

"Living in that queer humbug still — eh?"

"In the Vill — ino, my Lord, you mean?"

"Egad! she seems the only thing left; like the dog on the wreck. Eh, Haggy?"

"Just so, my Lord," said the other, with a complacent laugh.

"What a mass of old crockery she must have got together by this time," said the Viscount, yawning with a terrible recollection of her tiresomeness.

"You came out with a yacht, my Lord?" asked Haggerstone.

"Pretty well, for a man that they call ru — ru — ruined," said Purvis, laughing.

Norwood turned a look of angry indignation at him, and then, as if seeing the unworthiness of the object, merely said —

"A yacht is the only real economy now-a-days. You get rid at once of all trains of servants, household, stable people — even the bores of your acquaintance you cut off. By — bye, Purvis." And, with a significant wink at Haggerstone, he passed across the street, in time to overtake Onslow, who was just passing.

"I think I ga — ga — gave it him there," cried Purvis, with a hysteric giggle of delight; who, provided that he was permitted to fire his shot, never cared how severerly he was himself riddled by the enemy's fire. Meanwhile, the Viscount and his friend were hastening forward to the Mazzarini Palace, as totally forgetful of Purvis as though that valuable individual had never existed.

We may take this opportunity to mention, that when the rumours which attributed a grand breach of honourable conduct to Lord Norwood had arrived at Florence, Sir Stafford, who never had any peculiar affection for the Viscount, declared himself in the very strongest terms on the subject of his offending, and took especial pains to show the marked distinction between occasions of mere wasteful extravagance and instances of fraudulent and dishonest debt.

It was in vain he was told that the rigid rule of English morality is always relaxed abroad, and that

the moral latitude is very different in London and Naples. He was old-fashioned enough to believe that honour is the same in all climates; and having received from England a very detailed and specific history of the noble Lord's misdoings, he firmly resolved not to receive him.

With all George Onslow's affection and respect for his father, he could not help feeling that this was a mere prejudice — one of the lingering remnants of a past age; a sentiment very respectable, perhaps, but totally inapplicable to present civilisation, and quite impracticable in society. In fact, as he said himself, "who is to be known, if this rule be acted on?" What man, or, further still, what woman of fashionable life will stand this scrutiny! To attempt such exclusiveness, one should retire to some remote provincial town — some fishing village of patriarchal simplicity; and, even there, what security was there against ignoble offendings? How should he stand the ridicule of his club and his acquaintance, if he attempted to assume such a standard? These arguments were strengthened by his disbelief, or rather his repugnance to believe the worst of Norwood; and furthermore, supported by Lady Hester's open scorn for all such "hypocritical trumpery," and her avowal that the Viscount should be received, by *her*, at least. Exactly, as of old, George Onslow's mind was in a state of oscillation and doubt — now, leaning to this side, now, inclining to that — when the question was decided for him, as it so often is in like cases, by a mere accident; for, as he loitered along the street, he suddenly felt an arm introduced within his own; he turned hastily round, and saw Norwood, who, with all his customary cool-

ness, asked after each member of the family, and at once proposed to pay them a visit.

Of all men living, none were less suited than Onslow for assuming any part, or taking any decisive line, which could possibly be avoided, or even postponed. He hated, besides, to do an ungracious thing anywhere, or to any one. It might be, thought he, that Norwood's scrape could all be explained away. Perhaps, after all, the thing is a mere trifle; and if he were to take the decided line of cutting a man without due cause, the consequences might be most injurious. These, and fifty such like scruples, warred within him, and so engaged his attention, that he actually heard not one word of all that "town gossip" which Norwood was retailing for his amusement. At last, while following out his own thoughts, George came to the rosolution of finding out, at once, the precise position in which Norwood stood, and to this end asked the last news from Newmarket.

Norwood's coolness never forsook him, at a question whose very suddenness was somewhat awkward.

"Bad enough," said, he, with an easy laugh. "We have all of us been 'hit hard.' Knolesby has lost heavily. Burchester, too, has had a smasher; and I myself have not escaped. In fact, George, the 'Legs' have had it all their own way. I suppose you heard something about it out here?"

"Why, yes; there were reports —"

"Oh, hang reports, man. Never trust to old women's tales. And that confounded fellow Haggerstone, I 'm certain, has been spreading all kinds of stories. But the facts are simple enough."

"I 'm heartily glad you say so; for, to tell you the

truth, Norwood, my father is one of the prejudiced about this affair, and I am dying to be able to give him a full explanation of the whole."

"Ah! Sir Stafford, too, among the credulous!" said Norwood, slowly. "I could scarcely have supposed so. No matter; only I did fancy that he was not exactly the person to form hasty conclusions against any man's character. However, you may tell him — for, as for myself, I 'll not condescend to explain to any one but you — the thing is a very simple one. There was a mare of Hopeton's, a Brockdon filly, entered for the Slingsby, and a number of us agreed to 'go a heavy thing' upon her against the field. A bold *coup* always, George, that backing against the field. Never do it, my boy, and particularly when you' ve a set of rascally foreign Legs banded against you — Poles and Hungarian fellows, George, the downiest coves ever you met, and who, in their confounded jargon, can sell you before your own face. Nothing like John Bull, my boy. Straight, frank, and open John for ever! Hit him hard, and he 'll hit you again; but no treachery, no stab in the dark. Oh, no, no! The turf in England was another thing before these Continental rascals came amongst us. I was always against admitting them within the ring. I blackballed a dozen of them at the Club. But see what perseverance does; they 're all in now. There 's no John Bull feeling among our set, and we' re paying a smart price for it. Never trust those German fellows, George. Out of England there is no truth, no honour. But, above all, don't back against the field; there are so many dodges against you; so many 'dark horses' come out fair. That 's it, you see; that 's the way I

got it so heavily; for when Ruxton came and told me that "Help-me-Over" was dead lame, I believed him. A fetlock lameness is no trifle, you know; and there was a swelling as large as my hand around the coronet. The foreign fellows can manage that in the morning, and the horse will run to win the same day. I saw it myself. Ah, John Bull for ever! No guile, no deceit in him. Mind me, George, I make this confession for you alone. I'll not stoop to repeat it. If any man dare to insinuate anything to my discredit, I'll never give myself the trouble of one word of explanation, but nail him to it — twelve paces, and no mistake. I don't think my right hand has forgot its cunning. Have him out at once, George; parade him on the spot, my boy; that's the only plan. What, is this your quarter?" asked he, as they stopped at the entrance of the spacious palace. I used to know this house well of old. It was the Embassy in Templeton's time. Very snug it used to be. Glad to see you've banished all those maimed old deities that used to line the staircase, and got rid of that tiresome tapestry, too. Pretty vases those — fresh-looking that conservatory — they're always strong in camelias in Florence. This used to be the billiard-room; I think you've made a good alteration; it looks better as a *salon.* Ah! I like this — excellent taste that chintz furniture — just the thing for Italy, and exactly what nobody ever thought of before!"

"I'll see if my Lady be visible," said George, as he threw the *Morning Post* to his friend, and hastily quitted the chamber.

Norwood was no sooner left alone, than he proceeded to take a leisurely survey of the apartment, in

the course of which his attention was arrested by a water-colour drawing, representing a young girl leaning over a balcony, and which he had no difficulty in at once guessing to be Kate Dalton. There was something in the character of her beauty — an air of almost daring haughtiness — that seemed to strike his fancy, for, as he gazed, he drew himself up to his full height, and seemed to assume in his own features the proud expression of the portrait.

"With a hundred thousand and that face, one might make you a Viscountess, and yet not do badly either!" said he to himself; and then, as if satisfied that he had given time enough to a mere speculative thought, he turned over the visiting cards, to see the names of the current acquaintance — "Midchikoff, Estrolenka, Janini, Tiverton, Latrobe — the old set; the Ricketts, too, and Haggerstone. What can have brought them here? Oh! there must have been a ball; for here are shoals of outsiders — the great Smith-Brown-and-Thompson community; and here, on the very smallest of pasteboards, in the very meekest of literals, have we our dear friend 'Albert Jekyl.' He 'll tell me all I want to know," said Norwood, as he threw himself back on the comfortable depth of a well-cushioned chair, and gave way to a pleasant reverie.

When George Onslow had informed Lady Hester of Norwood's arrival, he hastened to Sir Stafford's apartment, to tell him how completely the Viscount had exonerated himself from any charge that might be made to his discredit; not, indeed, that George understood one syllable of the explanation, nor could trace anything like connexion between the disjointed links of the narrative; he could only affirm his own perfect

conviction in Norwood's honour, and hope an equal degree of faith from his father. Fortunately for his powers of persuasiveness, they were not destined to be so sorely tried, for Sir Stafford had just walked out, and George, too eager to set all right about Norwood, took his hat and followed, in the hope of overtaking him.

Lady Hester was already dressed, and about to enter the drawing-room, when George told her that Norwood was there; and yet she returned to her room, and made some changes in her toilet, slight, and perhaps too insignificant to record, but yet of importance enough to occupy some time, and afford her an interval for thoughts which, whatever their nature, served to flush her cheek and agitate her deeply.

It is an awkward thing at any time to meet with the person to whom you once believed you should have been married — to see, on the terms of mere common acquaintance, the individual with whose fate and fortune you at one time fancied your own was indissolubly bound up, for weal or woe, for better or for worse. To exchange the vapid commonplaces of the world — to barter the poor counters of that petty game called society with her or him with whom you have walked, in all the unbounded confidence of affection, speculating on a golden future, or glorying in a delicious dream of present bliss — to touch with ceremonious respect that hand you have so often held fast within your own — to behold with respectful distance that form beside which you have sat for hours, lost in happy fancies — to stand, as it were, and trace out with the eye some path in life we might have followed, wondering whither it would have led

us, if to some higher pinnacle of gratified ambition, if to disappointments darker than those we have ever known; speculating on a future which is already become a past, and canvassing within our hearts the follies that have misled and the faults that have wrecked us! Such are among the inevitable reminiscences of meeting; and they are full of a soft and touching sorrow, not all unpleasing either, as they remind us of our youth and its buoyancy. Far otherwise was the present case. Whatever might have been the bold confidence with which Lady Hester protested her belief in Norwood's honour, her own heartfelt knowledge of the man refuted the assertion. She knew thoroughly that he was perfectly devoid of all principle, and merely possessed that conventional degree of fair dealing indispensable to association with his equals. That he would do anything short of what would subject him to disgrace she had long seen; and perhaps the unhappy moment had come, when even this restraint was no longer a barrier. And yet, with all this depreciating sense of the man, would it be believed, that she had once loved him! — aye, with as sincere an affection as she was capable of feeling for anything.

'T is true, time and its consequences had effaced much of this feeling — his own indifference had done something — her new relations with the world had done more; and if she ever thought of him now, it was with a degree of half terror, that there lived one man who had so thoroughly read all the secrets of her heart, and knew every sentiment of her nature.

Norwood was sitting in a chair as she entered, amusing himself with the gambols of a little Blenheim

spaniel, whose silver collar bore the coronet of the Russian Prince. He never perceived Lady Hester until she was close beside him, and in easy, half indifferent tone, said —

"How d'ye do, my Lord?"

"What, Hester!" said he, starting up, and taking her hand in both his own.

She withdrew it languidly, and seating herself, not upon the sofa to which he wished to lead her, but in a chair, asked when he had arrived, and by what route.

"I came out in a yacht; stopping a few days at Gibraltar, and a week at Malta."

"Had you pleasant weather?"

"After we got clear of the Channel, excellent weather."

"You came alone, I suppose?"

"Quite alone."

"How do you get on without your dear friend Effingdale, or your 'familiar,' Upton?"

Norwood coloured a little at a question the drift of which he felt thoroughly, but tried with a laugh to evade an answer.

"Are they in England? I thought I read their names at the Newmarket meeting?" asked she, after waiting in vain for a reply.

"Yes; they were both at Newmarket," replied he, shortly.

"Was it a good meeting?"

"I can scarcely say so," rejoined he, attempting a laugh. "*My* book turned out very unfortunately."

"I heard so," was the short reply; and in a tone so dry and significant, that a dead silence followed.

"Pretty spaniel, that," said Norwood, trying a slight *sortie* into the enemy's camp. "A present, I suppose, from Midchikoff?"

"Yes."

"It is not clean bred, however, no more than his late master. Have you seen much of the Prince?"

"He comes here every evening after the Opera.

"What a bore that must be — he is a most insufferable proser."

"I must say I disagree with you. I reckon him excessively agreeable.

"How changed you must be, Hes—, Lady Hester."

"I believe I am, my Lord."

"And yet you look the same — the very same as when we sauntered for hours through the old woods at Dipsley." She blushed deeply; less, perhaps, at the words, than at the look which accompanied them.

"Is this your newly-found niece, or cousin?" said Norwood, as he pointed to the portrait of Kate Dalton.

"Yes. Isn't she pretty?"

"The picture is."

"She is much handsomer, however — a charming creature in every respect — as you will confess, when you see her."

"And for what high destiny is she meant? Is she to be a Russian Princess, a Duchessa of Italy, or the good wife of an untitled Englishman?"

"She may have her choice, I believe, of either of the three."

"Happy girl!" said he, half scornfully; "and when may I hope to behold so much excellence?"

"To-day, if you like to dine here."

"I should like it much — but — but —"

"But what?"

"It's better to be frank at once, Hester," said he, boldly, "and say, that I feel you are grown very cold and distant toward me. This is not your old manner, this not exactly the reception I looked for. Now, if you have any cause for this, would it not be better and fairer to speak it out openly, than continue to treat me in this slighting fashion? You are silent — so, there is something. Pray let's hear it."

"What of Newmarket?" said she, in a low voice, so faint as almost to be a whisper.

"So, that's it," said he, as he folded his arms and looked steadfastly at her.

There was something in the cold and steady gaze he bestowed upon her that abashed, if not actually alarmed, Lady Hester. She had seen the same look once or twice before, and always as the prelude to some terrible evidence of his temper.

"Lady Hester," said he, in a low, distinct, and very slow voice, as though he would not have her lose a word he spoke; "the explanation which a man would ask for at the peril of his life, ought not, in common justice, to be quite costless to a lady. It is perfectly possible that you may not care for the price, be it so; only I warn you, that if you wish for any information on the subject you allude to, *I* will inquire whether —"

Here he dropped his voice, and whispered two or three words rapidly in her ear; after which she lay back, pale, sick, and almost fainting, without strength to speak or even to move.

"Do not say, or still less feel, that this contest is of my provoking. Never was any man less in the humour to provoke hostilities, and particularly from old friends. I have just had bad luck — the very worst of bad luck. I have lost everything but my head; and even that, cool and calculating as it is, may go, too, if I be pushed too far. Now you have a frank and free confession from me. I have told you more than I would to any other living; more, perhaps, than I ought even to you."

"Then what do you intend to do here?" asked she, faintly.

"Wait — wait patiently for a while; fix upon any one that I can discover mutters a syllable to my discredit, and shoot him as I would a dog."

"There may be some who, without openly discussing, will shun your society, and avoid your intercourse."

"Sir Stafford, for instance," said he, with an insolent laugh. She nodded slightly, and he went on. "My Lady's influence will, I'm certain, set me right in that quarter."

"I may be unequal to the task!"

"You can at least try, Madam."

"I have tried, Norwood. I have gone the length of declaring that I disbelieved every story against you, — that I reposed the most implicit faith in your honour, — and that I would certainly receive you, and admit your visits as heretofore."

"And, of course, you 'll keep your word?"

"If you exact it —"

"Of course I shall! Hester, this is no time for

quibbling. I've got into a mess, — the worst of all the bad scrapes which have ever befallen me. A little time and a little management will pull me through, — but I must have both; nor is it in such a place, and with such a society as this, a man need fear investigation. I came here, as formerly one went, to live 'within the rules.' Let me, at least, have the benefit of the protection for condescending to the locality."

"Sir Stafford, my Lady," said a servant, throwing open the door; and the old Baronet entered hastily, and, without deigning to notice Lord Norwood, walked straight up to Lady Hester, and said a few words in a low voice.

Affecting to occupy himself with the books upon the table, Norwood watched the dialogue with keen but stealthy glances, and then, as the other turned suddenly round, said,

"How d'ye do, Sir Stafford? I am glad to see you looking so well."

"I thank you, my Lord, I am perfectly well," said he, with a most repelling coldness.

"You are surprised to see me in Florence, for certain," said the other, with a forced laugh.

"Very much surprised to see you *here*, my Lord," was the abrupt reply.

"Ha! ha! ha! I thought so!" cried Norwood, laughing, and pretending not to feel the point of the remark. "But, now-a-days, one flits about the world in slippers and dressing-gown, and travelling inflicts no fatigue. I only left England ten days ago."

"The post comes in seven, my Lord," said Sir

Stafford; "I have had letters this morning, written this day week, and which give the last events in Town Life up to the very hour."

"Indeed! and what's the news, then?" said he, negligently.

"If your Lordship will favour me with your company for a few minutes, I may be able to enlighten you," said Sir Stafford, moving towards the door.

"With the greatest pleasure. Good-bye, Lady Hester," said he, rising; "you said seven o'clock dinner, I think."

"Yes," replied she; but in a voice almost inarticulate, from shame and terror.

"Now, Sir Stafford, I'm at your orders," said the Viscount, gaily, as he left the room, followed by the old man, whose crimson cheek and flashing eye bespoke the passion which was struggling within him.

Of the two who now entered Sir Stafford's library, it must be owned that Lord Norwood was, by many degrees, the more calm and collected. No one, to have looked at him, could possibly have supposed that any question of interest, not to say of deep moment, awaited him; and as he carried his eyes over the well-filled shelves and the handsome fittings of the chamber, nothing could be more naturally spoken than the few complimentary expressions on Sir Stafford's good taste and judgment.

"I shall not ask you to be seated, my Lord," said the old Baronet, whose tremulous lip and shaking cheek showed how deep-felt was his agitation. "The few moments of interview I have requested will be, I

have no doubt, too painful to either of us; nor could we desire to prolong them. To me, I own, they are very, very painful."

These hurried, broken, and unconnected sentences, fell from him as he searched for a letter among a number of others that littered the table.

Lord Norwood bowed coldly, and, without making any reply, turned his back to the fire, and waited in patience.

"I have, I fear, mislaid the letter," said Sir Stafford, whose nervous anxiety had now so completely mastered him, that he threw the letters and papers on every side without perceiving it.

The Viscount made no sign, but suffered the search to proceed without remark.

"It was a letter from Lord Effingdale," continued the Baronet, still busied in the pursuit; "a letter written after the Newmarket settling, my Lord; and, if I should be unfortunate enough not to find it, I must only trust to my memory for its contents."

Lord Norwood gave another bow, slighter and colder than the former, as though to say that he acquiesced perfectly, without knowing in what.

"Ah! here it is! here it is!" cried Sir Stafford, at last detecting the missing document, which he hastily opened and ran his eyes over. "This letter, my Lord," continued he, "announces that, in consequence of certain defalcations on your part, the members of the 'Whip Club' have erased your Lordship's name from their list, and declared you incapacitated from either entering a horse, or naming a winner for the stakes in future. There, there, my Lord, is the paragraph,

coupled with what you will doubtless feel to be a very severe, but just comment on the transaction."

Norwood took the letter and read it leisurely — as leisurely and calmly as though the contents never concerned him, and then, folding it up, laid it on the chimney-piece beside him.

"Poor Effingdale!" said he, smiling; "he ought to spell better, considering that his mother was a governess. He writes '*naming*' with an 'e.' Didn't you remark that?"

But, as Sir Stafford paid no attention to the criticism, he went on.

"As to the 'Whip,' I may as well tell you, that I scratched my own name, myself. They are a set of low 'Legs,' and, except poor Effy and two or three others of the same brilliant stamp, not a gentleman amongst them."

"The defalcation is, however, true?" asked Sir Stafford.

"If you mean to ask whether a man always wins at Doncaster or Newmarket, the question is of the easiest to answer."

"I certainly presume that he always pays what he loses, my Lord," replied Sir Stafford, colouring at the evasive impertinence of the other.

"Of course he does, when he has it! Sir Stafford; but that is a most essential condition, for the 'Turf' is not precisely like a mercantile pursuit."

Sir Stafford winced under the flippant insolence with which this was spoken.

"There is not exactly a fair way to calculate profit, nor any assurance against accidental loss. A

horse, Sir Stafford, is not an Indiaman; a betting man is, therefore, in a position quite exceptional."

"If a man risks what he cannot pay, he is dishonourable," said Sir Stafford, in a short, abrupt tone.

"I see that you cannot enter into a theme so very different from all your habits and pursuits. You think there is a kind of bankruptcy when a man gets a little behind with his bets. You don't see that all these transactions are on 'honour,' and that if one does 'bolt,' he means to 'book up' another time. There was George, your own son —"

"What of him? — what of George?" cried Sir Stafford, with a convulsive grasp of the chair, while all the colour fled from his cheek, and he seemed ready to faint with emotion.

"Oh, nothing in the world to cause you uneasiness. A more honourable fellow never breathed than George."

"Then, what of him? How comes his name to your lips at such a discussion as this? Tell me, this instant, my Lord. I command — I entreat you!"

And the old man shook like one in an ague; but Norwood saw his 'vantage ground, and determined to use it unsparingly. He therefore merely smiled, and said —

"Pray be calm, Sir Stafford. I repeat, that there is nothing worthy of a moment's chagrin. I was only about to observe, that if I had the same taste for scandal-writing as poor Effy, I might have circulated a similar story about your son George. He left England, owing me a good round sum, for which, by the way, I was terribly 'hard up;' and although the

money was paid eventually, what would you have thought of *me* — what would the world have thought of *him* — if I had written such an epistle as this?"

And, as he spoke, his voice and manner warmed into a degree of indignant anger, in which, as if carried away, he snatched the letter from the chimney-piece and threw it into the fire. The act was unseen by Sir Stafford, who sat with his head deeply buried between his hands, a low faint groan alone bespeaking the secret agony of his heart.

"My son has, then, paid you? He owes nothing, my Lord?" said he, at last looking up, with a countenance furrowed by agitation.

"Like a trump!" said Norwood, assuming the most easy and self-satisfied manner. "My life upon George Onslow! Back him to any amount, and against the field anywhere! A true John Bull! — no humbug, no nonsense about *him*! — straightforward and honourable, always!"

"Your position is, then, my Lord," said Sir Stafford, whose impatience would not permit him to listen longer; "you have quitted England, leaving for future settlement a number of debts for which you have not the remotest prospect of liquidation."

"Too fast — you go too fast!" said the Viscount, laughing.

"Lord Effingdale writes the amount at thirty thousand pounds, and adds that, as a defaulter —"

"There 's the whole of it," broke in Norwood. "You ring the changes about that one confounded word, and there is no use in attempting a vindication. 'Give a dog a bad name,' as the adage says. Now, I took the trouble this very morning to go over the

whole of this tiresome business with George. I explained to him fully, and, I hope, to his entire satisfaction, that I was simply unfortunate in it — nothing more. A man cannot alway 'ride the winner;' I'm sure I wish *I* could. Of course, I don't meant to say that it's not a confounded 'bore' to come out here and live in such a place as this, and just at the opening of the season, too, when Town is beginning to fill; but, 'needs must,' we are told, 'when a certain gent sits on the coach-box.'"

Sir Stafford stood, during the whole of this speech, with his arms folded and his eyes fixed upon the floor. He never heard one word of it, but was deeply intent upon his own thoughts. At length he spoke in a full, collected, and firm voice:

"Lord Norwood — I am, as you have told me, perfectly unfitted to pronounce upon transactions so very unlike every pursuit in which my life has been passed. I am alike ignorant of the feelings of those who engage in them, and of the rules of honour by which they are guided; but this I know, that the man whom his equals decline to associate with at home, is not recognizable abroad; and that he who leaves his country with shame, cannot reside away from it with credit."

"This would be a very rude speech, Sir Stafford Onslow, even with the palliative preface of your ignorance, if our relative ages admitted any equality between us. I am the least bellicose of men — I believe I can say I may afford to be so. So long, therefore, as you confine such sentiments to yourself, I will never complain of them; but if the time comes

that you conceive they should be issued for general circulation —"

"Well, my Lord, what then?"

"Your son must answer for it — that's all!" said Norwood; and he drew himself up, and fixed his eye steadily on the distant wall of the room, with a look and gesture that made the old man sick at heart.

Norwood saw how "his shot told," and, turning hastily round, said,

"This interview, I conclude, has lasted quite long enough for either of us. If you have any further explanations to seek for, let them come through a younger man, and in a more regular form. Good morning."

Sir Stafford bowed, without speaking, as the other passed out.

To have seen them both at that moment, few would have guessed aright on which side lay all the disgrace, and where the spirit of rectitude and honour.

Sir Stafford, indeed, was most miserable. If the Viscount's mock explanations did not satisfy a single scruple of *his* mind, was it not possible they might have sufficed with others more conversant with such matters? Perhaps he is not worse than others of his own class. What would be his feelings if he were to involve George in a quarrel for such a cause? This was a consideration that pressed itself in twenty different forms, each of them enough to appal him. But the man is a defaulter; he has fled from England with "shame," was the stubborn conviction, which no efforts of his casuistry could banish; and the more he reflected on this, the less possible seemed anything like evasion or compromise.

CHAPTER III.

"The End of the First Act."

THE point discussed in our last chapter, if not a momentous one in itself, was destined to exercise a very important influence upon the fortunes of the Onslow family. The interview between Sir Stafford and the Viscount scarcely occupied five minutes; after which the Baronet wrote a note of some length to her Ladyship, to which she as promptly replied; a second, and even a third interchange of correspondence followed. The dinner party appointed for that day was put off; a certain ominous kind of silence pervaded the house. The few privileged visitors were denied admission. Mr. Proctor, Sir Stafford's man, wore a look of more than common seriousness. Mademoiselle Celestine's glances revealed a haughty sense of triumph. Even the humbler menials appeared to feel that something had occurred, and betrayed in their anxious faces some resemblance to that vague sense of half-curiosity, half-terror, the passengers of a steam-boat experience when an accident, of whose nature they know nothing, has occurred to the machinery.

Their doubts and suspicions assumed more shape when the order came that Sir Stafford would dine in the library, and her Ladyship in her own room; George Onslow alone appearing in the dining-room. There was an air of melancholy over everything; the silence deepening as night came on. Servants went

noiselessly to and fro, drew the curtains, and closed the doors with a half-stealthy gesture, and seemed as though fearful of awakening some slumbering outbreak of passion.

We neither have, nor desire to have, secrets from our readers. We will therefore proceed to Sir Stafford's dressing-room, where the old Baronet sat moodily over the fire, his anxious features and sorrow-struck expression showing the ravages even a few hours of suffering had inflicted. His table was littered with papers, parchments, and other formidable-looking documents. Some letters lay sealed here, others were half-written there; everything about him showed the conflict of doubt and indecision that was going on within his mind; and truly a most painful struggle was maintained there.

For some time back he had seen with displeasure the course of extravagance and waste of all his household; he had observed the habits of reckless expense with which his establishment was maintained; but possessing a very ample fortune, and feeling that probably some change would be made with the coming summer, he had forborn to advert to it, and endured with what patience he could a mode of life whose very display was distasteful to him. Now, however, a more serious cause for anxiety presented itself, in the class of intimates admitted by Lady Hester to her society. Of the foreigners he knew comparatively little, but that little was not to their advantage. Some, were wealthy voluptuaries, glad to propagate their own habits of extravagance among those they suspected of fortunes smaller than their own. Others, were penniless adventurers, speculating upon everything that might turn

to their profit. All, were men of pleasure, and of that indolent, lounging, purposeless character so peculiarly unpleasing to those who have led active lives, and been always immersed in the cares and interests of business.

Such men, he rightly judged, were dangerous associates to his son, the very worst acquaintances for Kate, in whom already he was deeply interested, but still no actual stain of dishonour — no palpable flaw could be detected in their fame, 'till the arrival of Lord Norwood added his name to the list.

To receive a man of whose misconduct in England he had acquired every proof, was a step beyond his endurance. Here or never must he take his stand; and manfully he did so. At first, by calm argument and remonstrance, and at last by firm resolution and determination. Without adverting to what had passed between the Viscount and himself, the letter he addressed to Lady Hester conveyed his unalterable resolve not to know Lord Norwood. Lady Hester's reply was not less peremptory, and scarcely as courteous. The correspondence continued with increasing warmth on both sides, 'till Sir Stafford palpably hinted at the possible consequences of a spirit of discordance and disagreement so ill-adapted to conjugal welfare. Her Ladyship caught up the suggestion with avidity, and professed that, whatever scruples his delicacy might feel, to hers there was none in writing the word, "Separation."

If the thought had already familiarised itself to his mind, the word had not; and strange it is, that the written syllables should have a power and a meaning that the idea itself could never realise.

To men who have had little publicity in their lives, and that little always of an honourable nature, there is no thought so poignantly miserable as the dread of a scandalous notoriety. To associate their names with anything that ministers to gossip — to make them tea-table talk — still worse, to expose them to sneering and impertinent criticisms, by revealing the secrets of their domesticity, is a torture to which no mere physical suffering has anything to compare. Sir Stafford Onslow was a true representative of this class of feeling. The sight of his name in the list of Directors of some great enterprise, as the Patron of a charity, the Governor of a hospital, or the Donor to an institution, was about as much of newspaper notoriety as he could bear without a sense of shrinking delicacy; but to become the mark for public discussion in the relations of his private life — to have himself and his family brought up to the bar of that terrible ordeal, where bad tongues are the eloquent, and evil speakers are the witty, was a speculation too terrible to think over; and this was exactly what Lady Hester was suggesting!

Is it not very strange that woman, with whose nature we inseparably and truly associate all those virtues that take their origin in refinement and modesty, should sometimes be able to brave a degree of publicity, to which, a man, the very hardiest and least shamefaced, would succumb, crestfallen and abashed; that her timid delicacy, her shrinking bashfulness, can be so hardened by the world, that she can face a notoriety where every look is an indictment, and every whisper a condemnation!

Now, if Lady Hester was yet remote from this, she

had still journeyed one stage of the road. She had abundant examples around her of those best received and best looked on in society, whose chief claim to the world's esteem seemed to be the contempt with which they treated all its ordinances. There was a dash of heroism in their effrontery that pleased her; they appeared more gay, more buoyant, more elastic in spirits than other people; their increased liberty seemed to impart enlarged and more generous views, and they were always "good-natured," since, living in the very glassiest of houses, they never "shied" a pebble.

While, then, Sir Stafford sat overwhelmed with shame and sorrow at the bare thought of the public discussion that awaited him, Lady Hester was speculating upon condolences here, approbation there, panegyrics upon her high spirit, and congratulations upon her freedom. The little half-shadowy allusions her friends would throw out from time to time upon the strange unsuitableness of her marriage with a man so much her senior, would soon be converted into comments of unrestricted license. Besides — and perhaps the greatest charm of all was — she would then have a grievance — not the worn-out grievance of some imaginary ailment, that nobody believes in but the "Doctor" — not the mock agonies of a heart complaint, that saves the sufferer from eating bad dinners in vulgar company, but always allows them a respite for a *déjeûner* at the Court, or a supper after the Opera with a few chosen "convives" — but a real substantial grievance, over which men might be eloquent and ladies pathetic. Such were the different feelings with which two persons contemplated the

same event. Sir Stafford's thoughts turned instantly towards England. What would be said there by all those friends who had endeavoured to dissuade him from this ill-suited union? Their sorrowful compassion was even less endurable than the malice of others; and Grounsell, too — what would his old friend think of a catastrophe so sudden? In his heart, Sir Stafford was glad that the Doctor was absent, much as he needed his counsel and advice; he still more dreaded the terror of his triumphant eye at the accomplishment of his oft-repeated prediction.

From George he met no support whatever. He either believed, or thought that he believed, Norwood's garbled explanation. Intercourse with a certain set of "fast men" had shown him that a man might do a "screwy" thing now and then, and yet not be cut by his acquaintance; and the young Guardsman deemed his father's rigid notions nothing but prejudices — very excellent and commendable ones, no doubt, but as inapplicable to our present civilisation as would be a coat of mail, or a back-piece of chain-armour. George Onslow, therefore, halted between the two opinions. Adhering to his father's side from feelings of affection and respect, he was drawn to Lady Hester's by his convictions; not, indeed, aware how formidable the difference had already become between them, and that, before that very night closed in, they had mutually agreed upon a separation, which, while occupying the same house, was essentially to exclude all intercourse.

One consideration gave Sir Stafford much painful thought. What was to become of Kate Dalton in this new turn of affairs? The position of a young girl on a visit with a family living in apparent unity and hap-

piness was very wide apart from her situation as the companion of a woman separated, even thus much, from her husband. It would be equally unfair to her own family, as unjust to the girl herself, to detain her then, in such a conjuncture. And, yet, what was to be done? Apart from all the unpleasantness of proposing an abrupt return to her home, came the thought of the avowal that must accompany the suggestion — the very confession he so dreaded to make. Of course, the gossipping of servants would soon circulate the rumour. But then they might not spread it beyond the Alps, nor make it the current talk of a German watering-place. Thus were his selfish feelings at war with higher and purer thoughts. But the struggle was not a long one. He sat down, and wrote to Lady Hester. Naturally assuming that all the reasons which had such force for himself would weigh equally with her, he dwelt less upon the arguments for Kate's departure than upon the mode in which it might be proposed and carried out. He adverted with feeling to the sacrifice the loss would inflict upon Lady Hester, but professed his conviction in the belief that all merely selfish considerations would give way before higher and more important duties.

"As it is," said he, "I fear much that we have done anything but conduce to this dear girl's welfare and happiness. We have shown her glimpses of a life whose emptiness she cannot appreciate, but by whose glitter she is already attracted. We have exposed her to all the seductions of flattery, pampering a vanity which is perhaps her one only failing. We have doubtless suggested to her imagination dreams of a future never to be realised, and we must now consign

her to a home where all the affections of fond relatives will be unequal to the task of blinding her to its poverty and its obscurity. And yet even this is better than to detain her here.

"It shall be my care to see in what way I can — I was about to write recompense, nor would the word be unsuitable — recompense Mr. Dalton for the injury we have done him as regards his child; and if you have any suggestion to make me on this head, I will gladly accept it."

The note concluded with some hints as to the manner of making the communication to Kate, the whole awkwardness of which Sir Stafford, if need were, would take upon himself.

The whole temper of the letter was feeling and tender. Without even in the most remote way adverting to what had occurred between Lady Hester and himself, he spoke of their separation simply in its relation to Kate Dalton, for whom they were both bound to think and act with caution. As if concentrating every thought upon *her*, he did not suffer any other consideration to interfere. Kate, and Kate only, was all its theme.

Lady Hester, however, read the lines in a very different spirit. She had just recovered from a mesmeric trance, into which, to calm her nervous exaltation, her physician, Dr. Buccellini, had thrown her. She had been lying in a state of half-hysterical apathy for some hours, all volition — almost all vitality — suspended, under the influence of an exaggerated credulity, when the letter was laid upon the table.

"What is that your maid has just left out of her hand?" asked the Doctor, in a tone of semi-imperiousness.

"A letter — a sealed letter," replied she, mystically waving her hand before her half-closed eyes.

The Doctor gave a look of triumph at the bystanders, and went on.

"Has the letter come from a distant country, or from a correspondent near at head?"

"Near!" said she, with a shudder.

"Where is the writer at this moment?" asked he.

"In the house," said she, with another and more violent shuddering.

"I now take the letter in my hand," said the Doctor, "and what am I looking at?"

"A seal with two griffins supporting a spur."

The Doctor showed the letter on every side, with a proud and commanding gesture.

"There is a name written in the corner of the letter, beneath the address. Do you know that name?"

A heavy thick sob was all the reply.

"There — there — be calm, be still," said he, majestically motioning with both hands towards her; and she immediately became composed and tranquil.

"Are the contents of this letter such as will give you pleasure?"

A shake of the head was the answer.

"Are they painful?"

"Very painful," said she, pressing her hand to her temples.

"Will these tidings be productive of grand consequences?"

"Yes, yes!" cried she, eagerly.

"What will you do, when you read them?"

"Act!" ejaculated she, solemnly.

"In compliance with the spirit, or in rejection?"

"Rejection!"

"Sleep on — sleep on," said the Doctor, with a wave of his hand; and, as he spoke, her head drooped, her arm fell listlessy down, and her long and heavy breathing denoted deep slumber. "There are people, Miss Dalton," said he to Kate, "who affect to see nothing in mesmerism but deception and trick, whose philosophy teaches them to discredit all that they cannot comprehend. I trust you may never be of this number."

"It is very wonderful, very strange," said she, thoughtfully.

"Like all the secrets of nature, its phenomena are above belief; yet, to those who study them with patience and industry, how compatible do they seem with the whole order and spirit of creation. The great system of vitality being a grand scheme of actionary and reactionary influences, the centrifugal being in reality the centripetal, and those impulses we vainly fancy to be our own instincts, being the impressions of external forces. Do you comprehend me?"

"Not perfectly; in part, perhaps;" said she, diffidently.

"Even that is something," replied he, with a bland smile. "One whose future fortunes will place her in a station to exert influence, is an enviable convert to have brought to truth."

"I!" said she, blushing with shame and surprise together; "surely, you mistake, Sir; I am neither born to rank, nor like to attain it."

"Both one and the other, young lady," said he, solemnly; "high as your position will one day

be, it will not be above the claims of your descent. It is not on fallible evidence that I read the future."

"And can you really predict my fortune in life?" asked she, eagerly.

"More certainly than you would credit it, when told!" said he, deliberately.

"How I should like to hear it, — how I should like to know —" She stopped, and a deep blush covered her face.

"And why should you not know that your dreams will be realised," said he, hastily, as if speaking from some irresistible impulse. "What more natural than to desire a glance, fleeting though it be, into that black vista, where the bright lightning of prophecy throws its momentary splendour."

"And how know you that I have had dreams?" said she, innocently.

"I know of them but by their accomplishment. I see you not in the present or the past, but in the future. There your image is revealed to me, and surrounded by a splendour I cannot describe. It is gorgeous, and barbaric in magnificence; there is something feudal in the state by which you are encompassed that almost speaks of another age."

"This is mere dream land, indeed," said she, laughing.

"Nay, not so; nor is it all bright and glorious, as you think. There are shadows of many a dark tint moving along the sunlit surface."

"But how know you all this?" asked she, half-incredulously.

"As you slept last evening in a mesmeric slumber

on that sofa; but I will hear no further questioning. Look to our patient here, and if that letter agitate her overmuch, let me be sent for." And, with these words delivered oracularly, the Doctor left the room; while Kate seated herself beside the sofa where Lady Hester slept.

It was late in the night when Lady Hester awoke, and soon remembering that a letter had arrived, broke the seal and read it. If the proposal of Sir Stafford was in every way unacceptable, there was something which compensated for all, in the excitement of spirits an act of opposition was sure to produce; nor was it without a sense of triumph that she read lines penned in evident sorrow and depression of spirit. In fact, she made the not uncommon error of mistaking sorrow for repentance, and thought she perceived in her husband's tone a desire to retrace his steps. It is difficult to say whether such an *amende* would have given her pleasure; certainly she would not have accepted it without subjecting him to a term of probation of more or less length. In any case, as regarded Kate, she was decided at once upon a positive refusal; and as, with *her*, a resolve and a mode of action were usually the work of the same moment, she motioned to Kate to sit down beside her on the sofa; and passing her arm around her, drew her fondly towards her."

"Kate, dearest," said she, "I 'm sure nothing would induce you to leave me — I mean, to desert and forsake me!"

Kate pressed the hand she held in her own to her lips with fervour, but could not speak for emotion.

"I say this," said Lady Hester, rapidly, "because the moment has come to test your fidelity. Sir Staf-

ford and I — it is needless to state how and by what means — have at last discovered, what I fancy the whole world has seen for many a day, that we were totally unsuited to each other — in taste, age, habit, feeling, mode of life, and thought; that we have nothing in common — neither liking nor detesting the same things, but actually at variance upon every possible subject and person. Of course, all attempt to cover such discrepancies must be a failure. We might trump up a hollow truce, child, but it never could be an alliance; and so we have thought — I 'm sure it is well that we have hit upon even one topic for agreement — we have thought that the best, indeed the only thing we could do, was — to separate!"

An exclamation, almost like an accent of pain, escaped Kate at these words.

"Yes, dearest," resumed Lady Hester; "it was his own proposal, made in the very coldest imaginable fashion; for men have constantly this habit, and always take the tone of dignity when they are about to do an injustice. All this, however, I was prepared for, and could suffer without complaint; but he desires to rob me of you, my dear child — to deprive me of the only friend, the only confidant I have in the world. I don't wonder that you grow pale and look shocked at such cruelty, concealed as it is under the mask of care for your interests, and regard for your welfare; and this to *me*, dearest — to me, who feel to you as to a sister — a dear, dear sister!" Here Lady Hester drew Kate towards her, and kissed her twice affectionately. "There 's his letter, my sweet child; you can read it; or better, indeed, that you should not, if you would preserve any memory of your good opinion of him!"

"And he that was ever so kind, so thoughtful, and so generous!" cried Kate.

"You know nothing of these creatures, my dear," broke in Lady Hester. "All those plausibilities that they play off in the world are little emanations of their own selfish natures; they are eternally craving admiration from us women, and that is the true reason of their mock kindness and mock generosity! I'm sure," added she, sighing, "*my* experience has cost me pretty dearly! What a life of trial and privation has mine been!"

Lady Hester sighed heavily, as her jewelled fingers pressed to her eyes a handkerchief worth a hundred guineas, and really believed herself a case for world-wide sympathy. She actually did shed a tear or two over her sorrows; for it is wonderful on what slight pretension we can compassionate ourselves! She thought over all the story of her life, and wept! She remembered how she had been obliged to refuse the husband of her choice — she forgot to be grateful for having escaped a heartless spendthrift — she remembered her acceptance of one inferior to her in rank, and many years her senior, but forgot his wealth, his generosity, his kindliness of nature, and his high character. She thought of herself as she was at eighteen — the flattered beauty, daughter of a Peer, courted, sought after, and admired; but she totally forgot what she was at thirty — with faded attractions, unthought of, and, worse still, unmarried. Of the credit side of her account with Fortune, she omitted not an item; the debits she slurred over as unworthy of mention. That she should be able to deceive herself is nothing very new nor strange; but that she should succeed in

deceiving another is, indeed, singular; and such was the case. Kate listened to her, and believed everything; and when her reason failed to convince, her natural softness of disposition served to satisfy her that a more patient, long-suffering, unrepining being never existed, than Lady Hester Onslow.

"And now," said she, after a long peroration of woes, "can you leave me here, alone and friendless? — will you desert me?"

"Oh, never, never!" cried Kate, kissing her hand, and pressing her to her heart. "I would willingly lay down my life to avert this sad misfortune; but, if that cannot be, I will share your lot with the devotion of my whole heart."

Lady Hester could scarcely avoid smiling at the poor girl's simplicity, who really fancied that separation included a life of seclusion and sorrow, with restricted means, and an obscure position; and it was with a kind of subdued drollery she assured Kate, that even in her altered fortunes, a great number of little pleasures and comforts would remain for them. In fact, by degrees, the truth came slowly out, that the great change implied little else than unrestrained liberty of action, freedom to go anywhere, know any one, and be questioned by nobody. The equivocal character of the position adding a piquancy to the society, inexpressibly charming to all those who, like the Duchesse d'Abrantes, think it only necessary for a thing to be "wrong," to make it perfectly delightful.

Having made a convert of Kate, Lady Hester briefly replied to Sir Stafford, that his proposition was alike repugnant to Miss Dalton as to herself — that she regretted the want of consideration on his part, which

could have led him to desire that she should be friendless at a time when the presence of a companion was more than ever needed. This done, she kissed Kate three or four times affectionately, and retired to her room, well satisfied with what the day had brought forth, and only wishing for the morrow, which should open her new path in life.

It often happens in life that we are never sufficiently struck with the force of our own opinions or their consequences, 'till, from some accident or other, we come to record them. Then it is that the sentiments we have expressed, and the lines of action adopted, suddenly come forth in all their unvarnished truth. Like the images which the painter, for the first time, commits to canvas, they stand out to challenge a criticism which, so long as they remained in mere imagination, they had escaped.

This was precisely Kate Dalton's case, now. Her natural warm-heartedness, and her fervent sense of gratitude, had led her to adopt Lady Hester's cause as her own; generous impulses carrying reason all before them, attached her to what she fancied to be the weaker side. "The divinity that doth hedge" "beauty" made her believe that so much loveliness could do no wrong; nor was it 'till she came to write of the event to her sister, that even a doubt crossed her mind on the subject. The difficulty of explaining a circumstance of which she knew but little, was enhanced by her knowledge of Ellen's rigid and unbending sense of right. "Poor dear Nelly," said she, "with her innocence of mind, will understand nothing of all this, or she will condemn Lady Hester at once. Submission to her husband would, in her opinion, have been the

first of duties. She cannot appreciate motives which actuate society in a rank different from her own. In her ignorance of the world, too, she might deem my remaining here unadvisable; she might counsel my return to home; and thus I should be deserting, forsaking, the dear friend who has confided all her sorrows to my heart, and reposes all her trust in my fidelity. This would break Lady Hester's heart and my own together; and yet nothing is more likely than such a course." Better a thousand times not expose her friend's cause to such a casualty. A little time and a little patience may place matters in a position more intelligible and less objectionable; and, after all, the question is purely a family secret, the divulgence of which, even to a sister, is perhaps not warrantable.

Such were among the plausibilities with which she glanced over her conduct; without, however, satisfying herself that she was in the right. She had only began the descent of lax morality, and her head was addled by the new sensation. Happy are they who, even from weak nerves, relinquish the career!

Kate's letter home, then, was full of gay revelations. Galleries, churches, gardens; objects of art or historic interest; new pictures of manners; sketches of society, abounded. There were descriptions of *fêtes*, too, and brilliant assemblies, with great names of guests and gorgeous displays of splendour. Well and sweetly were they written; a quick observation and a keen insight into character in every line. The subtle analysis of people and their pretensions, which comes of mixture with the world, was pre-eminent in all she said; while a certain sharp wit pointed

many of the remarks, and sparkled in many a brilliant passage.

It was altogether a lively and a pleasant letter. A stranger, reading it, would have pronounced the writer clever and witty; a friend, would have regretted the want of personal details, the hundred little traits of egoism, that speak confidence and trust. But to a sister! and such a sister as Nelly! it was, indeed, barren! No outpouring of warm affection; no fond memory of home; no reference to that little fireside, whence her own image had never departed, and where her presence was each night invoked.

Oh! Kate, has Hanserl's dark prophecy thrown its shadow already to your feet? Can a young heart be so easily corrupted, and so soon?

CHAPTER IV.

A Small Dinner at the Villino Zoe.

Among the penalties great folk pay for their ascendancy, there is one most remarkable, and that is, the intense interest taken in all their affairs by hundreds of worthy people who are *not* of their acquaintance. This feeling, which transcends every other known description of sympathy, flourishes in small communities. In the capital of which we are now speaking, it was at its very highest pitch of development. The Onslows furnished all the table-talk of the city; but in no circle were their merits so frequently and ably discussed as in that little parliament of gossip which held its meetings at the "Villino Zoe."

Mrs. Ricketts, who was no common diplomatist, had done her utmost to establish relations of amity with her great neighbour. She had expended all the arts of courtesy, and all the devices of politeness, to effect this "entente cordiale;" but all in vain. Her advances had been met with coldness, and "something more;" her perfumed little notes, written in a style of euphuism all her own, had been left unanswered; her presents of fruit and flowers unacknowledged — it is but fair to add, that they never proceeded further than the porter's lodge — even her visiting cards were only replied to by the stiff courtesy of cards, left by Lady Hester's "Chasseur;" so that, in fact, failure

had fallen on all her endeavours, and she had not even attained to the barren honour of a recognition as they passed in the promenade.

This was a very serious discomfiture, and might, when it got abroad, have sorely damaged the Ricketts' ascendancy in that large circle, who were accustomed to regard her as the glass of fashion. Heaven knew what amount of insubordination might spring out of it! what rebellious notions might gain currency and credit! It was but the winter before when a Duchess, who passed through, on her way to Rome, asked, "Who Mrs. Ricketts was?" and the shock was felt during the whole season after. The Vandyk, for whose authenticity Martha swore, was actually called in question. The "Sevres" cup she had herself painted, was the subject of a heresy as astounding. We live in an age of movement and convulsion — no man's landmarks are safe now, and Mrs. Ricketts knew this.

The Onslows, it was clear, would not know *her*; it only remained, then, to show why she would not know *them*. It was a rare thing to find a family settling down at Florence, against whom a "True Bill" might not easily be found of previous misconduct. Few left England without a reason, that might readily become an allegation. Bankruptcy or divorce were the light offences; the higher ones, we must not speak of. Now the Onslows, as it happened, were not in this category. Sir Stafford's character was unimpeachable — her Ladyship's had nothing more grave against it than the ordinary levities of her station. George "had gone the pace," it was true, but nothing disreputable attached to him. There was no use, therefore, in "trying back" for a charge, and Mrs. Ricketts per-

ceived that they must be arraigned on the very vaguest of evidence. Many a head has fallen beneath the guillotine for a suspicion, and many a heart been broken on a surmise!

A little dinner at the Villino opened the plan of proceedings. It was a small "auto-da-fé" of character, at which the Onslows were to be the victims, while the grand inquisitors were worthily represented by the Polish Count, Haggerstone, Purvis, and a certain Mr. Foglass, then passing through Florence on his way to England. This gentleman, who was the reputed son of a supposed son of George the Fourth, was received as "very good royalty" in certain circles abroad, and, by virtue of a wig, a portly chest, and a most imposing pomposity of manner, taken to be exceedingly like his grandfather — just on the same principle as red currant jelly makes middling mutton resemble venison.

To get rid of his importunity, a Minister had made him Consul in some remote village of the East, but finding that there were neither fees nor perquisites, Foglass had left his post to besiege the doors of Downingstreet once more, and if rejected as a suppliant, to become an admirable grievance for a Radical Member, and a "very cruel case of oppression" for the morning papers.

Foglass was essentially a "humbug;" but, unlike most, if not all other humbugs, without the smallest ingredient of any kind of ability. When men are said to live by their wits, their capital is, generally speaking, a very sufficient one; and that interesting class of persons known as adventurers, numbers many clever talkers, shrewd observers, subtle tactitians, and ad-

mirable billiard players; with a steady hand on a pistol, but ready to "pocket" either an "insult" or a "ball," if the occasion require it. None of these gifts pertained to Foglass. He had not one of the qualities which either succeed in the world or in society, and yet, strange to say, this intolerable bore had a kind of popularity; that is to say, people gave him a vacant place at their dinners, and remembered him at pic-nics.

His whole strength lay in his wig, and a certain slow, measured intonation, which he found often attracted attention to what he said, and gave his tiresome anecdotes of John Kemble, Munden, and Mathews, the semblance of a point they never possessed. Latterly, however, he had grown deaf, and, like most who suffer under that infirmity, taken to speaking in a whisper so low as to be inaudible — a piece of politeness for which even our reader will be grateful, as it will spare him the misery of his twaddle.

Haggerstone and he were intimates — were it not a profanation of the word, we should say, friends. They were, however, always together; and Haggerstone took pains to speak of his companion as a "monstrous clever fellow, who required to be known to be appreciated." Jekyl probably discovered the true secret of the alliance, in the fact that they always talked to each other about the nobility, and never gave them their titles; an illusory familiarity with Dukes and Earls that appeared to render them supremely happy. Richmond, Beaufort, Cleveland, and Stanley, were in their mouths as "Household words."

After all, it was a harmless sort of pastime; and if

these "Imaginary Conversations" gave them pleasure, why need we grumble?

We have scruples about asking our reader even to a description of the Ricketts' dinner. It was a true Barmecide feast. There was a very showy bouquet of flowers; there was a lavish display of what seemed silver; there was a good deal of queer china and impracticable glass; in short, much to look at, and very little to eat. Of this fact the Pole's appreciation was like an instinct, and as the *entrées* were handed round, all who came after him became soon aware of. Neither the wine nor the dessert were temptations to a long sitting, and the party soon found themselves in the drawing-room.

"Son Excellence is going to England?" said the Pole, addressing Foglass, who had been announced as an Ambassador; "if you do see de Count Ojeffskoy, tell him I am living here, as well as a poor exile can, who have lost palaces, and horses, and diamonds, and all de rest."

"Ah! the poor dear Count!" sighed Mrs. Ricketts; while Martha prolonged the echo.

"You carry on the war tolerably well, notwithstanding," said Haggerstone, who knew something of the other's resourses in *piquet* and *écarté*.

"Carry on de war!" rejoined he, indignantly, "wid my fader, who work in de mines! and my beautiful sisters, who walk naked about de streets of Crakow!"

"What kind of climate have they in Crak — Crak — Crak —" A fit of coughing finished a question which nobody thought of answering; and Purvis sat down, abashed, in a corner.

"Arthur, my love," said Mrs. Ricketts — she was

great at a diversion, whenever such a tactic was wanted — "do you hear what Colonel Haggerstone has been saying?"

"No, dearest," muttered the old General, as he worked away with rule and compass.

"He tells me," said the lady, still louder, "that the Onslows have separated. Not an open, formal separation, but that they occupy distinct apartments, and hold no intercourse whatever."

"Sir Stafford lives on the *rez de chaussée*," said Haggerstone, who, having already told the story seven times the same morning, was quite perfect in the recital — "Sir Stafford lives on the *rez de chaussée*, with a small door into the garden. My Lady retains the entire first floor and the grand conservatory. George has a small *garçon* apartment off the terrace."

"How very distressing!" sighed Mrs. Ricketts, whose woe-worn looks seemed to imply that she had never heard of a similar incident before; "and how unlike us, Arthur," added she, with a smile of beaming affection. "He has ever been what you see him, since the day he stole my young, unsuspecting heart."

The Colonel looked over at the object thus designated, and, by the grin of malice on his features, appeared to infer that the compliment was but a sorry one, after all.

"'John Anderson my Jo, John,'" muttered he, half aloud.

"'We 've climbed the hill toge — ge — ge — ther,'" chimed in Purvis, with a cackle.

"Gather what, Sir? — Blackberries, was it?" cried Haggerstone.

"Don't quote that low-lived creature," said Mrs. Ricketts, "a poet only conversant with peasants and their habits. Let us talk of our own order. What of these poor Onslows?"

"Sir Stafford dines at two, Madam. A cutlet, a vegetable, and a cherry tart; two glasses of Gordon's sherry, and a cup of coffee."

"Without milk. I had it from Proctor," broke in Purvis, who was bursting with jealousy at the accuracy of the other's narrative.

"You mean without sugar, Sir," snapped Haggerstone. "Nobody does take milk-coffee after dinner."

"I always do," rejoined Purvis, "when I can't get mara — mara — mara —"

"I hope you can get maraschino down easier than you pronounce it, Sir."

"Be quiet Scroope," said his sister; "you always interrupt."

"He do make de devil of misverstandness wit his what-ye-call-'um," added the Pole, contemptuously.

And poor Purvis, rebuked on every side, was obliged to fall back beside Martha and her embroidery

"My Lady," resumed Haggerstone, "is served at eleven o'clock The moment Granzini's solo is over in the Ballet, an express is sent off to order dinner. The table is far more costly than Midchikoff's."

"I do believe well," said the Count, who always, for nationality sake, deemed it proper to abuse the Russian. "De Midchikoff cook tell me, he have but ten paoli — how you say — par tête — by the tête — for his dinner; dat, to include everyting, from the caviar to the sheeze."

"That was not the style at the Pavilion formerly,"

roared out Haggerstone, repeating the remark in Foglass's ear.

And the ex-Consul smiled blandly towards Mrs. Ricketts, and said, "He'd take anything to England for her with pleasure."

"He's worse than ever," remarked Haggerstone, irritably. "When people have a natural infirmity, they ought to confine themselves to their own room."

"Particularly when it is one of the tem — tem — temper," said Purvis, almost choked with passion.

"Better a hasty temper than an impracticable tongue, Sir," said Haggerstone.

"Be quiet, Scroope," added Mrs. Ricketts; and he was still. Then, turning to the Colonel, she went on: "How thankful we ought to be that we never knew these people. They brought letters to us — some, indeed, from dear and valued friends. That sweet Diana Comerton, who married the Duke of Ellswater, wrote a most pressing entreaty that I should call upon them."

"She didn't marry the Duke; she married his Chap — Chaplain," chimed in Purvis.

"Will you be quiet, Scroope?" remarked the Lady.

"I ought to know," rejoined he, grown courageous in the goodness of his cause. "He was Bob Nutty. Bitter Bob, we always called him at school. He had a kind of a poly — poly — poly" —

"A polyanthus," suggested Haggerstone.

"No. It was a poly — polypus — a polypus, that made him snuffle in his speech."

"Ach Gott!" sighed the Pole; but whether in sorrow for poor "Bob," or in utter weariness at his historian, was hard to say.

"Lady Foxington, too," said Mrs. Ricketts, "made a serious request that we should be intimate with her friend Lady Hester. She was candid enough to say that her Ladyship would not suit *me*. 'She has no soul, Zoe,' wrote she, 'so I needn't say more.'"

"Dat is ver bad," said the Pole, gravely.

"Still I should have made her acquaintance, for the sake of that young creature, Miss Dalton, I think they call her, and whom I rather suspect to be a distant cousin of ours."

"Yes; there were Dawkinses at Exeter — a very respectable solicitor, one was, Joe Dawkins," came in Purvis; "he used to say we were co — co — co — connexions."

"This family, Sir, is called Dalton, and not even a stutter can make that Dawkins."

"Couldn't your friend, Mr. Foglass, find out something about these Daltons for us, as he goes through Germany?" asked Mrs. Ricketts of the Colonel.

"No one could execute such a commission better, Madam, only you must give him his instructions in writing. Foglass," added he, at the top of his voice, "let me have your note-book for a moment."

"With pleasure," said he; presenting his snuff-box.

"No; your memorandum-book!" screamed the other, louder.

"It 's gone down," whispered the deaf man. "I lost the key on Tuesday last."

"Not your watch, man. I want to write a line in your note-book;" and he made a pantomimic of writing.

"Yes, certainly; if Mrs. R. will permit, I 'll write to her with pleasure."

"Confound him," muttered Haggerstone; and, taking up a visiting card, he wrote on the back of it, "Could you trace the Daltons, as you go back by Baden?"

The deaf man at once brightened up; a look of shrewd intelligence lighted up his fishy eyes as he said —

"Yes, of course; say what do you want?"

"Antecedents — family — fortune," wrote Haggerstone.

"If dey have de tin," chimmed in the Pole.

"If they be moral and of irreproachable reputation," said Mrs. Ricketts.

"Are they related to the other Dawkinses?" asked Purvis. "Let him ask if their mother was not godfather to — no, I mean grandfather — to the Reverend Jere — Jere — Jere —"

"Be quiet, Scroope! will you be quiet?"

"There, you have it all, now," said Haggerstone, as he finished writing. "Their 'family, fortune, flaws, and frailties' — 'what they did, and where they did it' — observing accuracy as to Christian names, and as many dates as possible."

"I 'll do it," said Foglass, as he read over the "instruction."

"We want it soon, too," said Mrs. Ricketts. "Tell him we shall need the information at once."

"This with speed," wrote Haggerstone at the foot of the memorandum.

Foglass bowed a deep assent.

"How like his grandfather," said Mrs. Ricketts, in ecstasy.

"I never knew he had one," whispered Hagger-

stone to the Pole. "His father was a coachmaker in Long Acre."

"Is he not thought very like them?" asked Mrs. Ricketts, with a sidelong glance of admiration at the auburn peruke.

"I've heard that the wig is authentic, Madam."

"He has so much of that regal urbanity in his manner."

"If he is not the first gentleman of England," muttered Haggerstone to himself, "he is the first one in his own family at least."

"By-the-way," said Mrs. Ricketts, hastily, "let him inquire into that affair of Lord Norwood."

"No necessity, Madam; the affair is in *Bell's Life*, with the significant question, 'Where is he?' But he can learn the particulars at all events." And he made a note in the book.

"How dreadful all this, and how sad to think Florence should be the resort of such people."

"If it were not for raparees and refugees, Madam, house-rent would be very inexpensive," said the Colonel, in a subdued voice; while, turning to the Pole, he added, "and if respectability is to be always a caricature, I'd as soon have its opposite. I suppose you do not admit the Viscount, Madam?"

"He has not ventured to present himself," said Mrs. Ricketts, proudly. "I hope that there is at least one sanctuary where virtue can live unmolested." And, as she spoke, she looked over at Martha, who was working away patiently, but whether happy in the exclusive Tariff, aforesaid, or somewhat tired of "Protection," we are unable to say.

"What has he do?" asked the Count.

"He has done the 'Ring' all round, I believe," said Haggerstone, chuckling at a joke which he alone could appreciate.

"Dey do talk of play in England!" said the Pole, contemptuously; "dey never do play high, with dere leetle — how you call 'em — bets, of tree, four guinea! at *écarté*. But in Polen we have two, tree, five tousand crowns on each card. Dere, crack! you lose a fortune, or I do win one! One evening at Garowidsky's I do lose one estate of seventeen million florins, but I no care noting for all that! I was ver rich, wit my palaces and de mayorat — how you call dat?"

Before this question could be answered, the servant threw open the double door of the *salon* and announced, "Milordo Norwood!" A shell might have burst in the apartment and not created much more confusion. Mrs. Ricketts gave a look at Martha, as though to assure herself that she was in safety. Poor Martha's own fingers trembled as she bent over her frame; Haggerstone buttoned up his coat, and arranged his cravat with the air of a man so consummate a tactitian, that he could actually roll himself in pitch and yet never catch the odour; while Purvis, whose dread of a duellist exceeded his fear of a mad dog, ensconced himself behind a stand of geraniums, where he resolved to live in a state of retirement until the terrible Viscount had withdrawn. As for the Count, a preparatory touch at his moustache, and a slight arrangement of his chair, sufficed him to meet anything; and as these were the ordinary details of his daily toilet, he performed them with a rapidity quite instinctive.

To present one's self in a room where our appea-

rance is unacceptable, is, perhaps, no slight test of tact, manner, and effrontery; to be actually indifferent to the feelings around, is to be insensible to the danger; to see the peril and yet appear not to notice it, constitutes the true line of action. Lord Norwood was perfect in this piece of performance, and there was neither exaggerated cordiality nor any semblance of constraint in his manner as he advanced to Mrs. Ricketts, and, taking her hand, pressed it respectfully to his lips.

"This salutation," said he, gaily, "is a commission from Lord Kennycroft, your old and constant admirer. It was his last word as we parted, 'Kiss Mrs. Ricketts' hand for me, and say, I am faithful as ever.'"

"Poor dear Lord! General, here is Lord Norwood come to see us."

"How good of him — how very kind. Just arrived from the East, my Lord?" said he, shaking Foglass by the hand, in mistake.

"No, Sir; from Malta." He wouldn't say England, for reasons. "Miss Ricketts, I am most happy to see you; — and still occupied with the fine arts? Haggy, how d'ye do? Really it seems to me like yesterday since I sat here last in this delightful armchair, and looked about me, on all these dear familiar objects. You've varnished the Correggio, I think?"

"The Vandyk, my Lord."

"To be sure — the Vandyk. How stupid I am. Indeed, Lady Foxington said, that not all your culture would ever make anything of me."

"How is Charlotte?" asked Mrs. Ricketts; this being the familiar for Lady F.

"Just as you saw her last. Thinner, perhaps, but looking admirably."

"And the dear Duke — how is he?"

"Gouty — always gouty — but able to be about."

"I am so glad to hear it. It is so refreshing to talk of old friends."

"They are always talking of you. I 'm sure, 'Zoe' — forgive me the liberty — Zoe Ricketts is an authority on every subject of taste and literature."

"How did you come here, my Lord?" whispered Haggerstone.

"The new opera broke down, and there is no house open before twelve," was the hasty reply.

"Is Jemima married, my Lord?"

"No. There 's something or other wrong about the settlements. Who 's the foreigner, Haggy?"

"A Pole. Petrolaffsky."

"No, no — not a bit of it. *I* know him," said the other, rapidly; then, turning to Mrs. Ricketts, he grew warmly interested in the private life and adventures of the nobility, for all of whom she entertained a most catholic affection.

It was, indeed, a grand field-day for the Peerage; even to the "Pensioners" all were under arms. It was a review such as she rarely enjoyed, and certainly she "improved the occasion." She scattered about her noble personages with the profusion of a child strewing wild flowers. There were Dukes she had known from their cradles; Marchionesses with whom she had disported in childhood; Earls and Viscounts who had

been her earliest playmates; not to speak of a more advanced stage in her history, when all these distinguished individuals were suppliants and suitors. To listen to her, you would swear that she had never played shuttlecock with anything under an Earl, nor trundled a hoop with aught below a Lord in Waiting! Norwood fooled her to the top of her bent. To use his own phrase, "He left her easy hazards, and everything on the balls." It is needless to say that, in such pleasant converse, she had no memory for the noble Viscount's own transgressions. He might have robbed the Exchequer, or stolen the Crown jewels, for anything that she could recollect! and when, by a seeming accident, he did allude to Newmarket, and lament his most "unlucky book," she smiled complacently, as though to say, that he could afford himself even the luxury of being ruined, and not care for it.

"Florence is pretty much as it used to be, I suppose," said he; "and one really needs one's friends to rebut and refute foolish rumours, when they get abroad. Now, you'll oblige me by contradicting, if you ever hear this absurd story. I neither did win forty thousand from the Duke of Stratton, nor shoot him in a duel, for non-payment." — Both these derelictions were invented on the moment. — "You'll hear fifty other similar offences laid to my charge; and I trust to you and the Onslows for the refutation. In fact, it is the duty of one's own class to defend 'their order.'"

Mrs. Ricketts smiled blandly, and bowed — bowed as though her gauze turban had been a coronet, and the tinsel finery, jewelled straw-berry leaves! To be

coupled with the Onslows in the defence of a Viscount was a proud thought. What if it might be made a grand reality?

"*Apropos* of the Onslows, my Lord," said she, insidiously, "you are very intimate with them. How is it that we have seen so little of each other? Are we not congenial spirits?"

"Good Heavens! I thought you were like sisters. There never were people so made for each other. All your tastes, habits, associations — forgive me, if I say your very antipathies — are alike; for you both are unforgiving enemies of vulgarity. Depend upon it, there has been some underhand influence at work. Rely on't, that evil tongues have kept you apart." This he said in a whisper, and with a sidelong glance towards where Haggerstone sat at *écarté* with the Pole.

"Do you really think so?" asked she, reddening with anger, as she followed the direction of his eyes.

"I can hit upon no other solution of the mystery," said he, thoughtfully; "but know it I will, and must. You know, of course, that they can't endure him."

"No, I never heard that!"

"It is not mere dislike, it is actual detestation. I have striven to moderate the feeling. I have said, 'True enough the man is bad "ton," but you needn't admit him to anything like intimacy. Let him come and go with the herd you receive at your large parties, and, above all, never repeat anything after him, for he has always the vulgar version of every incident in high life.'"

Mrs. Ricketts raised her arched eyebrows and looked astonished, but it was a feeling in which acquiescence was beautifully blended, and the Viscount marked it well.

"You must tell me something of this Miss Dalton," said he, drawing his chair closer; "they affect a kind of mystery about her. Who is she? What is she?"

"There are various versions of her story, abroad," said Mrs. Ricketts, who now spoke like the Chief Justice delivering a charge. "Some say that she is a natural daughter of Sir Stafford's; some aver that she is the last of a distinguished family, whose fortune was embezzled by the Onslows; others assert that she is a half-sister of Lady Hester's own; but who ought to know the truth better than you, my Lord?"

"I know absolutely nothing. She joined them in Germany, but where, when, and how, I never heard."

"I 'll soon be able to inform you, my Lord, on every detail of the matter," said she, proudly. "Our kind friend yonder, Mr. Foglass, has undertaken to discover everything. Mr. F. — will you touch his arm for me, Martha? and, the gentleman being aroused to consciousness, now arose, and approached Mrs. Ricketts' chair — "may I be permitted to take a glance at your note-book?" This speech was accompanied by a pantomimic gesture which he quickly understood. "I wish to show you, my Lord," said she, addressing the Viscount, "that we proceed most methodically in our searches after title, as I sometimes call it — ha! ha! ha! Now, here is the precious little volume, and this will explain the degree of accuracy such an investigation demands. This comes of living

abroad, my Lord," added she, with a smile. "One never can be too cautious — never too guarded in their intimacies! The number of dubious people one meets with — the equivocal characters that somehow obtain a footing in society — Here, I really must ask you to decipher these ingenious hieroglyphics yourself." And she handed the book to his Lordship.

He took it courteously at the spot she opened it, and, as his eyes fell upon the page, a slight — very slight — flush rose to his cheek, while he continued to read the lines before him more than once over. "Very explicit, certainly!" said he, while a smile of strange meaning curled his lip; and then, closing the book, he returned it to the lady's hand; not, however, before he had adroitly torn out the page he had been looking at, and which contained the following words: — "Norwood's affair — the precise story of the N. M. business — if cut in England, and scratched at the 'Whip.'" "I cannot sufficiently commend either your caution or your tact, Mrs. Ricketts," said he, bowing urbanely; "without a little crutiny of this kind, our *salons* would be overrun with blacklegs and bad characters!"

It was now late — late enough for Lady Hester — and the Viscount rose to take his leave. He was perfectly satisfied with the results of his visit. He had secretly enjoyed all the absurdities of his hostess, and even stored up some of her charming flights for repetition elsewhere; he had damaged Haggerstone, whose evil-speaking he dreaded, and, by impugning his good breeding, had despoiled him of all credit; he had seen the Polish Count in a society which, even such as it was, was many degrees above his preten-

sions, and, although they met without recognition, a masonic glance of intelligence had passed between them; and, lastly, he had made an ally of the dear Zoe herself, ready to swear to his good character, and vouch for the spotless honour of all his dealings on turf or card-table.

"Has he explained the Newmarket affair, Madam?" said Haggerstone, as the door closed on the Viscount's departure.

"Perfectly, Colonel; there is not the shadow of a a suspicion against him."

"And so he was not scr — scr — scratched at the 'Whip?'" cried Purvis, emerging from his leafy retreat.

"Nothing of the kind, Scroope."

"A scratch, but not a wound, perhaps," said Haggerstone, with a grin of malice.

"I am ver happy — please ver moosh," said the Count, "for de sake of de order. I am republiquecain, but never forget I 'm de noble blood!"

"Beautiful sentiment," exclaimed Mrs. Ricketts, enthusiastically. "Martha, did you hear what the Count said? General, I hope you didn't lose it?"

"I was alway for de cause of de people," said the Count, throwing back his hair wildly, and seeming as if ready to do battle at a moment's warning.

"For an anti-monarchist, he turns up the king wonderfully often at *écarté*," said Haggerstone, in a low muttering, only overheard by Martha.

"I don't think the demo — demo — demo —" But before Purvis had finished his poly-syllabic word, the

company had time to make their farewell speeches and depart; indeed, as the servant came to extinguish the lamps, he found the patient Purvis very red in the face, and with other signs of excitement, deeply seated in a chair, and as if struggling against an access of suffocation.

What the profound sentiment which he desired to enunciate might therefore be, is lost to history, and this true narrative is unable to record.

CHAPTER V.

The Viscount's Vision.

When Lord Norwood arrived at the Mazzarini Palace, he was surprised not to find the usual half-dozen carriages of the *habitués* drawn up in the court-yard, and still more so to learn that her Ladyship did not receive that evening. He ascended to George Onslow's apartment, and discovered that he had dined with Prince Midchikoff, and not yet returned. Not knowing how to spend the hours, so much earlier than those of his usually retiring to rest, he lighted a cigar, and threw himself on a sofa before the fire.

The reveries of men who live much in the world are seldom very agreeable; the work of self-examination comes with a double penalty when it is rarely exercised, and the heavy arrears of time are formidable scores to confront. Lord Norwood was no exception to this theory. Not that he was one to waste time or temper in self-reproaches. The bygone was essentially with him the "irrevocable." It might, it is true, occasionally suggest a hint for the future, but it never originated a sorrow for the past. His philosophy was a very brief code, and comprised itself in this — "That he didn't think well of himself, but thought worse of all others." All that he had seen of life was duplicity, falsehood, selfishness, and treachery. In different stations these characteristics took different forms; and what was artfully cloaked in courtesy by

the Lord, was displayed in all its naked deformity by the Plebeian.

He might have conducted himself respectably enough had he been rich — at least, he fervently believed so — but he was poor, and therefore driven to stratagems to maintain his position in society. Cheated by his guardians and neglected by his tutor, he was sent into the world half-ruined and wholly ignorant, to become at first a victim, and afterwards the victimiser. With no spirit of retributive vengeance — there was nothing of reprisal in his line of conduct — he simply thought that such was the natural and inevitable course of events, and that every man begins as dupe and ends as knave. The highest flight of the human mind, in his esteem, was successful hypocrisy; and although without the plastic wit or the actual knowledge of life which are required well to sustain a part, he had contrived to impose upon a very large number of persons, who looked up to his rank; for, strange enough, many who would not have been duped by a Commoner, fell easy victims to the arts of "my Lord."

The value of his title he understood perfectly. He knew everything it could, and everything it could not, do for him. He was aware that the aristocracy of England will stand by one of their order through many vicissitudes; and that he who is born to a coronet has a charmed life, in circumstances where one less noble must perish ingloriously. He knew, too, how, for very shame sake, they would screen one of themselves, and by a hundred devices seem to contradict before the world, what they lament over behind its back: and, lastly, he knew well that he had always

a title and a lineage to bestow; and that the Peerage was the great prize among the daughters of men.

Now, latterly, he had been pushing prerogative somewhat too far: he had won large sums from young men not out of their teens; he had been associated in play transactions with names less than reputable; and, finally, having backed a stable to an immense amount at Newmarket, had levanted on the day of his losing. He had done the act deliberately and calmly. It was a *coup* which, if successful, replaced him in credit and affluence; if a failure, it only confirmed the wavering judgment of his set, and left him to shift for the future in a different sphere; for, while a disgraced Viscount is very bad company for Viscounts, he is often a very welcome guest amongst that amiably innocent class who think the privileges of the aristocracy include bad morals with blue ribbons.

The turf could now no longer be a career with him. *Écarté* and *Lansquenet* were almost as much out of the question. Billiards, as Sir Walter said of Literature, "might be a walking-stick, but never a crutch." There was, then, nothing left for it, but marriage. A rich heiress was his last *coup*, and as, in all likelihood, the thing could not be done twice, it required great circumspection.

In England this were easy enough. The manufacturing districts were grown ambitious. Cotton Lords were desirous of a more recognised nobility; and Mill-owners could be found ready to buy a coronet at the cost of half their fortune. But from England late events had banished him, and with a most damaged reputation.

Now, carrying nobility to the Continent, was like

bringing coals to Newcastle, the whole length and breadth of the land being covered with Counts, Barons, Dukes, and Princes; and although English nobility stands on a different footing, there was no distinguishing the "real article" amid this mass of counterfeit.

Every Frenchman of small fortune was an *émigré* Count; every German, of none, was sure to be a Baron; all Poles, unwashed, uncombed, and uncared for, were of the very cream of the aristocracy; and as for Italians! it was a nation of Princes, with their uncles all Cardinals. To be a Viscount in such company was, perhaps, like Lord Castlereagh's unstarred coat, *plus distingué*, but certainly more modest. The Milor, if not associated with boundless wealth, six carriages, two couriers, three cooks, and a groom of the chambers, the whole of the "Russie," or the "Black Eagle," means nothing abroad! if not bound up with all the extravagance, and all the eccentricities of riches — if not dazzling by display, or amazing by oddity. It is a contradiction of terms; and to be an English Noble, without waste, profusion, and absurdity, is to deny your country, or be a counterfeit of your class.

Lord Norwood knew and felt all these things. They had often occupied his speculations and engaged his thoughts; so that, if his mind reverted to them now, it was to regard them as facts for future theory to build upon, as mathematicians make use of the proofs of geometry without going over the steps which lead to conviction. No; all his present reflections took a practical form, and might be summed up in the one resolve, "I must go no further — I have done everything that a man dare do, perhaps a little more, and yet keep his footing in the world." That tacit

verdict of "not proven," which had been passed upon so many of his actions, might at any moment be reversed now, and a review of his life's career presented anything but a bright retrospect. Expulsion from a great school at thirteen; three years' private dissipation and secret wickedness in a clergyman's family; a dissolute regiment, from which he was given leave to sell out at Malta; two years with the Legion, or Don Carlos, it mattered not which, in Spain; a year or so in London, with a weak attempt at reformation; a staff appointment in India obtained and sold; exposure partly hushed up; Debts; Jews; Renewals; the Fleet; the Bankruptcy Court; a few disreputable Duels; an action for seduction; ending with the last affair at Newmarket, made up the grand outline; the details comprising various little episodes, with which we must not trouble ourselves.

One incident, however, would come up prominently before his Lordship's mind, and, however little given to let the past usurp the thoughts which should be given to the present, it still insisted upon sharing his attention. This was no less than a little love affair in Spain with a "ballerina" of the Opera, with whom, by the aid of a young priest then studying at Saragossa, he had contracted a mock marriage. The sudden movement of a corps of the army to which he was attached, gave him an opportunity of an easy divorce from his bride; and it is likely he had not twice thought of her since the event had happened. Now, however, that an intention of marrying in reality occurred to him, the incident came freshly to his mind, and he jocularly wondered if his second marriage might prove more fortunate than his first.

The hour and the place were favourable to reverie. It was past midnight; all was silent and noiseless in the great Palace; the sharp ticking of the clock on the mantel-piece was the only sound to be heard, save, at a long distance off, the dull, subdued flow of the Arno; the room itself, unlighted except by the flickering wood fire, was in deep shadow; and, lulled by these influences and his mild "Manilla," Norwood was free to revel in so much of dream-land as natures like his ever explore.

Who can tell whether men of this stamp know what it is to "grieve" — whether chagrin for some momentary disappointment, anger at being thwarted, is not the nearest approach to sorrow that they ever feel? The whole course of their lives seems opposed to the notion of deep or intense feeling, and the restless activity of their ingenious minds appears to deny the possibility of regrets. As for Norwood, he would have laughed at the puerility of going over the bygone; — therefore, if he did recur to a former incident of his life, it was involuntarily and probably induced by the accidental similarity with those which now engaged his thoughts.

"If this Dalton girl be rich," thought he, "I might do worse. There are no relatives to make impertinent inquiries, or ask awkward questions. Hester can, and must, if I desire, assist me. Living out of England, the girl herself will have heard nothing of my doings, and in name, appearance, and air, she is presentable anywhere." He thought, too, that, as a married man, his character would be in a measure rehabilitated. It would be like entering on a new road in life; and if this could be done with a certain degree of style and

outlay, he had great trust in the world's charity and forgivingness to pardon all the past. "A good house and a good cook," thought he, "are the best witnesses to call to character I have ever met. Turtle and champagne have proved sovereign remedies for slander in all ages; and the man who can sport Lafitte in the evening, and split a pencil at twenty paces of a morning, may defy envy, hatred, and malice, and all uncharitableness."

To find out about this girl's fortune was then his first object. As for family, his own rank was enough for both. The matter must be done quickly. The London season over, England would be pouring its myriads of talking, gossiping travellers over the Continent, and then he should be discussed — probably avoided and shunned too.

Even already certain unmistakable signs of coolness announced themselves amongst the men of his acquaintance. George Onslow avoided play when in his company. Treviliani, one of Lady Hester's chief danglers, and the patron of the Turf in Tuscany, wouldn't even allude to a horse before him. Prince Midchikoff went further, and actually, save on rare occasions, omitted him from his dinner list. Now, although Norwood averred that he detested "*petit jeu*," hated spooney talk about racing, and dreaded the tiresome display of a "Tartar feast," these were all threatening indications, and he saw their meaning. He would willingly have fastened upon some one man — fixed a quarrel on him, and shot him. He had more than once in life adopted this policy with success; but here it would have been inapplicable, and the public opinion, he

sought to bring on his own side, would have been only more inevitably arrayed against him.

"In what a mess does the want of money involve a man!" thought he, as he lay before the half-dying embers of the wood fire. "Had I won my bets on 'Chanticleer,' or had I but backed 'Amontillado,' how different had my position been to-day. That the simple change of one name for another in my betting-book — the mere hazard of a choice — of a horse too — should influence a man's whole life, is a pretty fair instance of what the world is! Had I 'come right,' I should now be the favoured guest of some noble Duke, shooting his Grace's pheasants, drinking his Burgundy, and flirting with his daughters. Fortune willed it otherwise, and here I am, actually plotting a match with a nameless girl to rescue myself from utter ruin. Three weeks ago I would not have believed that this could happen; and who can tell what another three weeks may bring forth? — perhaps already there is mischief brewing. What if my Lady's refusal to receive this evening, may have some signification in it? Haggerstone is too courteous by half, and Jekyl has never called upon me since my arrival!" He laughed ironically as he said this, and added, "It is a bold game after all for *them* to play! Reprisals — to two of them at least — might prove awkward; and as for 'Master Albert,' he lives but on general sufferance! There has been a long run of luck against me — nothing but ill-fortune since the day I might have married Hester, and yet hung back, and that very same year she marries another, and inherits an immense fortune in India. What a blow to each of us! Such has been my lot through life; always backing the loser 'till the

very moment when luck changes, and his turn comes to win."

As these thoughts passed through his mind, weariness, the silence of the hour, the darkened room, induced slumber; and although once or twice he made a half-effort to arouse himself and go home, the listless feeling gained the mastery, and he dropped off to sleep. The uneasy consciences have oftentimes very easy slumbers. Norwood's was of the calmest: not a dream, not one flitting fancy disturbed it.

It was already nigh day as he lay thus, when the dull roll of wheels beneath the window in part awoke him; at least, it so far aroused him that he remembered where he was, and fancied that it might be George Onslow, on the return from his dinner party. He lay for some minutes expecting to hear his step upon the stair, and see him enter the room; but as all seemed to resume its wonted quiet, he was dozing off again, when he heard the sound of a hand upon the lock of the door.

It is one of the strange instincts of half-slumber to be often more alive to the influence of subdued and stealthy sounds than to louder noises. The slightest whisperings, the low murmurings of a human voice, the creaking of a chair, the cautious drawing back of a curtain, will jar upon and arouse the faculties that have been insensible to the rushing flow of a cataract, or the dull booming of the sea.

Slight as were the sounds now heard, Norwood started as he listened to them, and, at once rousing himself, he fixed his eyes upon the door, in which the handle was seen to turn slowly and cautiously. The impression that it was a robber immediately occurred

to him, and he determined to lie still and motionless, to watch what might happen. He was not wanting in personal courage, and had full confidence in his strength and activity.

The door at last opened: at first, a very little and slowly, then gradually more and more, 'till, by the mysterious half-light to which his eyes had grown accustomed, Norwood could see the flounces of a female dress, and the small, neat foot of a woman beneath it. The faint, uncertain flame of the fire showed him thus much, but left the remainder of the figure in deep shadow.

Whether from excess of caution, or that she was yet hesitating what course to take, she remained for some seconds motionless; and Norwood, who had subdued his breathing to the utmost, lay in the deep shadow, speculating on the upshot of an adventure, from which he promised himself at least an amusing story. The deep black lace which fell over the arched instep indicated a degree of rank in the wearer that gave a piquancy to the incident, and imparted a zest to the curiosity of a man who probably knew no higher pleasure in life than in possessing the secrets of his acquaintance.

He had time to run over in his mind a dozen little speculations of who she was, ere she stirred; and at last, as if with change of purpose, he saw, or fancied that he saw, the door beginning slowly to close. Whether this was a mere trick of his excited imagination, or not, a sudden gesture of impatience on his part threw down one of the cushions of the sofa. A slight shriek — so slight as to be barely heard — broke from the female, and she banged the door to.

Norwood reached it with a spring; but although, as he wrenched it open, he could yet hear the rustling of a woman's dress in the passage, the sharp sound of a door hastily shut and locked defied all thought of pursuit, and he stood pondering over what had happened, and almost doubtful of its reality.

"At least the fair visitor belongs to the family; that much I may rely upon," said he, as he lighted a candle to explore the locality a little closer. The corridor, however, abruptly stopped at a small door, which was locked on the inside, but to what portion of the house it led, he could not even conjecture. He was not a very unlikely man to trace the clue of such an adventure as this seemed to be. It was one of those incidents with which his course of life had made him somewhat conversant; and few were better able to fill up from conjecture every blank of such a history. Nor was he one to shrink from any suspicion, no matter how repugnant to every thought of honour, nor how improbable to every mind less imbued with vice than his own.

For a moment or two, however, he almost doubted whether the whole might not have been a dream. So sudden, so brief, so trackless did it all appear. This doubt was, however, quickly resolved, as his eyes fell upon the floor, where a small fragment of a lace dress lay, as it was caught and torn off in the closing door. Norwood took it up, and sat down to examine it with attention.

"Point d'Alençon," said he, "bespeaks no vulgar wearer; and such is this! Who could have thought of George Onslow playing Lothario! But this comes of Italy. And now to find her out." He ran over to

himself half-a-dozen names, in which were nearly as many nationalities, but some doubt accompanied each. "No matter," thought he, "the secret will keep."

He suddenly remembered at the instant that he had promised an acquaintance to pass some days with him in the Maremma, shooting; and, not sorry to have so good a reason for a few days' absence, he arose and set out towards his hotel, having first carefully placed within his pocket-book the little fragment of lace — a clue to a mystery he was resolved to explore hereafter.

CHAPTER VI.

Frank's Journey.

Our readers may, ere this, have surmised that Frank Dalton's career as a soldier was neither very adventurous nor exciting, since otherwise we should scarcely have so nearly forgotten him. When he parted with Hanserl to pursue his journey, his heart was full of warring and conflicting emotions, love of home, and hope of future distinction, alternately swaying him; so that while his affections drew him ever backwards, his ambitions urged him to go on.

"I could have been so happy to have lived with them," thought he, "even as a peasant lives — a life of daily toil. I would have asked for no higher fortune than that peaceful home we had made for ourselves by our own affections — the happy fireside, that sufficed us for all the blandishments of wealth and riches. Still there would have been something ignoble in this humility — something that would ill-become my blood as a Dalton. It was not thus my ancestors understood their station — it was not with such lowly ambitions *their* hearts were stirred. Count Stephen himself might at this hour have been in obscurity and poverty — as great, perhaps, as our own — had he been thus minded; and now he is a Field-Marshal, with a 'Maria Theresa' cross on his breast! and this without one friend to counsel or to aid him! What a noble service is that where merit can win its way self-

sustained and independent — where, without the indignity of a patron, the path of honourable enterprise lies free and open to all! What generous promptings, what bold aspirations such a career engenders! He shall not be ashamed of me — he shall not have to blush for the Dalton blood," said the boy, enthusiastically; and he revelled in a dream of the Old Count's ecstasy on finding a nephew so worthy of their name, and in his fancy he saw pictures of future scenes in which he figured. All of these had the same rose tint; for while in some he imagined himself winning the high rewards of great achievements, in others he was the caressed and flattered guest of rank and beauty. "To think that I should once have been thus!" cried he, laughing at the conceit, "trudging along the high-road with a knapsack on my shoulder, like a Bursch in his 'Wander-jahre;'" and then he vowed to himself "that he would have a picture taken of his humble guise as first he started in life, to hang up at some future day beside the decorated soldier he was yet to be."

Selfishness can wear many a mask. Sometimes it can array itself in features almost noble — more often its traits are of the very meanest. Frank's egotism was of the former kind. He wanted to attain distinction by an honourable path — he would not have stooped to any other. He was ready to do, or dare, all for greatness. No peril could deter, no danger could daunt him; but yet was he totally deficient in that greatest element of success — that patient discipline of the mind which, made up of humility and confidence, can wait and bide its time, earning the prizes of life before it claim them. His pride of family,

however, was his greatest blemish, since it suggested a false notion of distinction — a pretension so groundless, that, like a forged bank-note, it was sure to involve even the bearer in disgrace.

So full was he of himself and his own future, that he took but little note of the way as he went. Avoiding, from a sense of pride, to associate with the "Travelling Youths," as they are called, he walked along from early morning to late evening, alone and companionless. It was mostly a dreary and uninteresting road, either leading through dark and gloomy pine forests, or over great plains of swampy surface, where the stubble of the tall maize, or the stunted vines, were the only traces of vegetation. As he drew near the Tyrol, however, the great mountains came in sight, while the continual ascent told that he was gradually reaching the land of glaciers and snow-peaks. Day by day he found the road less and less frequented: these lonely districts were little resorted to by the wandering apprentices, so that frequently Frank did not meet a single traveller from day-dawn 'till night. Perhaps he felt little regret at this, leaving him, as it did, more time for those day-dreams in which he loved to revel. Now and then, some giant mountain, glittering in the sun; or some dark gorge, thousands of feet below him, would chase away his reverie, and leave him, for a time, in a half-bewildered and wondering astonishment; but his thoughts soon resumed their old track, and he would plod along, staff in hand, as before.

Walking from before daybreak to a late hour of the evening, Frank frequently accomplished in his day's journey as many miles as the traveller who, by post,

only spent the few hours of mid-day on the road; in fact, he might have thus measured his speed, had he been less wrapped up in his own fancies, since, for several days, a calèche, drawn by three post-horses, had regularly passed him on the road, and always about the same hour.

Frank saw nothing of this; and when, on a bright and a frosty day he began the ascent of the Arlberg, he little knew that the carriage, about half a mile in front, had been his travelling-companion for the past week. Disdaining to follow the winding high-road, Frank ascended by those foot-tracks which gain upon the zig-zags, and thus soon was miles in advance of the calèche. At last he reached the half-way point of ascent, and was glad to rest himself for a few minutes on one of the benches, which German thoughtfulness for the wayfarer never neglects to place in suitable spots. A low parapet, of a couple of feet, separated the road from a deep and almost perpendicular precipice, at the foot of which, above two thousand feet beneath, stood the village of Stuben. There, was the little chapel in which he had heard his morning's mass — there, the little Platz, where he had seen the post-horses getting ready for the travellers; there, too, the little fountain, covered over with a shed of straw, and glistening with many an icicle in the bright sun. The very voices of the people reached him where he sat; and the sounds of a street-organ floated upwards through the still atmosphere. It was a scene of peaceful isolation, such as would have pleased Nelly's fancy. It was like one of those "Dorfs" she herself had often carved to amuse a winter's evening, and Frank's eyes filled up as he thought of her and of home.

The sound of feet upon the snow suddenly roused him, and, on looking round, Frank saw a traveller slowly coming up the pass. His dress at once proclaimed that he was not a pedestrian save from choice, and was merely sauntering along in advance of his carriage. In the mere cursory glance Frank bestowed upon him, he could see that he was a young and handsome man, with a certain soldierlike bearing in his air, that well suited his bold but somewhat stern features.

"You journey well, young fellow," said he, addressing Frank familiarly. "This is the fifth day we have been fellow-travellers; and although I have had post-horses, you have always kept up with me on your feet."

Frank touched his cap with a somewhat stiff courtesy at this unceremonious address; and, without deigning a reply, employed himself in arranging the straps of his knapsack.

"Are you a soldier?" asked the stranger.

"A Cadet!" replied Frank, as bluntly.

"In what regiment, may I ask?"

"The Franz Carl."

"Ah! my own old corps," said the other, gaily. "I served four years with them in the Banat. From what part of the Empire are you — you hav'n't the accent of an Austrian?"

"I am an Irishman."

"Oh! that explains it. And your name?"

"Dalton. And now, Sir, what may be yours, for I don't see why this curiosity is to be one-sided," said Frank, with an air even more insolent than the words.

"I am Count Ernest of Walstein," said the other, without a touch of irritation.

"What rank do you hold in the service?" asked Frank, boldly.

"That of Lieutenant-Colonel, boy."

"And your age may be about thirty?" said Frank, half in question and half in sarcasm.

"I was twenty-eight last August," was the calm reply.

"By Jove! that *is* a service!" exclaimed Frank, "where a man scarcely ten years my senior may command a regiment!"

The other laughed, and after a brief pause, said, "People are in the habit of calling me fortunate, so that you must not suppose my case to be the rule."

"Be it so: even as an exception, the example is a bright one. Another may do what you have done."

"If you mean that I have earned my rank by services, boy," said the Count, smiling, "you would make a grave mistake. My promotion had another source."

Frank looked as though he were curious to hear the explanation; but the other gave none.

"How do you call yourself?" asked he of Frank, after a pause.

"Dalton," replied the boy, more respectfully than before.

"We have a Field-Marshal of that name in the service — a most gallant old soldier, too."

"My granduncle!" cried Frank with enthusiasm.

"Indeed! So you are a grand nephew to the Graf von Auersberg," said the Count, taking a more deliberate view than he had yet bestowed upon him.

"Then how comes it you are travelling in this fashion, and on foot?"

"I have not asked you why you journey in a calèche with three horses," said Frank, insolently.

"It 's my habit to do so."

"This, then, may be *mine*, Sir," said Frank, throwing his knapsack on his shoulder, and preparing to depart.

"Is not the Franz Carl at Vienna?" said the Count, not seeming to notice the irritation of his manner.

"I believe so."

"Well, then, as I am going thither, perhaps you will accept of a seat in my calèche?"

There was a frankness in the way this offer was made that suddenly routed the ill-temper Frank had fallen into. No one was less disposed than himself to accept of a favour from a perfect stranger; but the tone and manner of the proffer had, somehow, disarmed it of all appearance of such, and as he stood uncertain what answer to make, the Count added, "I 'm always lucky. I was was just wishing for a travelling-companion, and fortune has thrown us into acquaintanceship."

"I don't know — I can scarcely tell," said Frank, hesitating, "how or what to answer."

"You forget that we are comrades, Dalton — or shall be, at least, in another day or two," said the Count, familiarly; "so step in, and no more about it."

The calèche had drawn up as he spoke, and the Courier stood, cap in hand, beside the door, so that Frank had no time for any but an abrupt refusal, and *that* he could not give; he therefore bowed his head,

and sprang in. The door was slammed sharply to, and the next moment the horses were rattling along over the snow, the merry bells of the harness jingling pleasantly as they went.

Probably no two beings could present a much stronger contrast than the two who now journeyed along side by side. The one, rich, highly placed, and distinguished with every gift of fortune at his command, and yet pleasure-sick, weary, and discontented; the other, poor, and almost friendless, full of hope, and ardent with all the buoyancy of youth. The Count was as jaded and tired of life as the Cadet was eager to enjoy it. Notwithstanding, — perhaps we should rather say — in virtue of these strong contrarieties, they made admirable travelling-companions, and the road slipped away unconsciously to each.

At Inspruck they halted for a day or two, and Frank accompanied his new friend to the cafés and theatres, mingling in the throng of those whose life is a round of easy dissipation. It is true, that to conform by dress and demeanour with these, Frank was obliged to spend the golden coins of Nelly's purse; Louis after Louis went in some one extravagance or another — sacrifices that cost him many a pang, but which, from pride, he bore up against with seeming indifference. Walstein presented him everywhere as the nephew of the old Field-Marshal von Auersberg; and as nothing was more common than to see a young Cadet dispensing the most lavish sums, with equipages, liveries, and servants, none seemed surprised that the youth should indulge in these habits and tastes of extravagance. His very enjoyment seemed like an earnest of being long habituated to these modes

of life, for whether he played or drank, or in whatever excesses he mingled, there was ever the same joyous spirit; and Frank Dalton had all the outward signs of a youth rich in every accident of fortune. At first, thoughts of his humble home and of those by whose sacrifices he was enabled to indulge in such costly pleasures, would cross his mind, and, what between shame and sorrow, he felt degraded and debased before himself; but, by degrees, the levity of action induced, as it ever will do, the levity of thinking; and he suffered himself to believe that "he was no worse than others." A more fatal philosophy than this, youth never adopted, and he who seeks a low standard, rarely stops, till he falls beneath even that. Frank's pride of family made him vain, and his vanity made him credulous; he, therefore, implicity believed all that his new companions told him. The familiar "thee" and "thou" of "camaraderie," giving an air of friendship to all the flatteries.

"Were I a nephew of a Field-Marshal like thee, I'd not serve in an infantry corps. I'd be in the Lichtenstein Hussars, or the Lancers of the Kaiser," said one.

"So he will," cried another. "Dalton only joined the Franz Carl to get his promotion quickly. Once at Vienna, he will be an officer, and ready to exchange his regiment."

"Old Auersberg can make thee what he will, lad," said a third. "He might have been Minister of War himself, if he had liked it. The Emperor Franz loved him as a brother."

"And he is rich, too; no one knows how rich," broke in a fourth. "He commanded for many years

on the Turkish frontier, in those good days when our Grenzers used to make forays upon the villages, and every Pashalick paid its black mail for peace' sake."

"Thou art a lucky dog, Dalton, to find thy promotion and an inheritance thus secured to thee."

"When thou hast a regiment, lad, don't forget us, poor devils, here, that have no uncles in the 'Maria Theresa' category."

"I'd lay my life on't, that he is a Colonel before I become Rittmeister," said a young Lieutenant of Dragoons, "and I have had five years' hard service in Galicia and Servia."

"And why not?" broke in Count Walstein, who sat silently, up to this, smoking his meerschaum in a corner. "Has the Empire lost its aristocratic character? Are not birth and blood to have their claims, as of old?"

This speech met a ready acceptance, for the company consisted of those who either were, or affected to be, of noble extraction.

"How our fathers deceive themselves in trying to deceive us!" said a young Hungarian Cadet. "I, too, was sent off to join my regiment on foot. Just fancy — to walk from Arad to Presburg! I, that never went twenty miles in my life, save on the saddle. They fitted me with my knapsack — just such a thing as Dalton's. I suppose about as many florins jingled in my purse as in his. They gave me their blessing and a map of the road, with each day's journey marked out upon it. And how far did I go afoot, thinkst thou? — Two miles and a half. There I took an 'Eil Bauer,' with four good horses and a wicker calèche, and we drove our sixty, sometimes seventy

miles a day. Each night we put up at some good country house or other — Honyadi's — Ctzyscheny's — Palfi's; all lay on the road, and I found out about fifty cousins I never knew of before, and made a capital acquaintance, too, the Prince Paul of Ettlingen, who, owning a regiment of Light Dragoons, took me into his corps, and, when I joined them at Leutmeritz, I was already an officer.

"What stuff it is! They preach about economy and thrift! Are we the sons of peasants or petty shopkeepers? It comes well, too, from them in their princely châteaux to tell us that we must live like common soldiers. So that, while yesterday, as it were, I sat at a table covered with silver, and drank my Tokay from a Venetian glass, to-morrow I must put up with sour Melniker or, mayhap, Bavarian beer, with black bread, and a sausage to help it down!

"Our worthy progenitors knew better in their own young days, or we should not have so many debts and mortgages on our estates — eh, Walstein?"

"I suppose the world is pretty much alike, in every age," said the Count, laughing. "It now and then takes a virtuous fit, and affects to be better than it used to be; but I shrewdly suspect that the only difference is in the hypocritical pretension. When I entered the service — and it is not so many years ago that I cannot recollect it — the cant was, to resemble that rough school of the days of old Frederick and Maria Theresa. Trenck's 'Pandours,' with their scarlet breeches stuffed into their wide boot-tops, were the mode; and to wear your moustache to your shoulders — to cry, 'Bey'm Henker!' and 'Alle Blitzen!' every moment, were the veritable types of the soldier.

Now we have changed all that. We have the Anglomania of English grooms and equipages, top-boots, curricles, hurdle races, champagne suppers. Dalton will be the 'ton' in his regiment, and any extravagance he likes to launch into, certain to have its followers."

The youth blushed deeply; partly in conscious pride at the flattery, partly in the heartfelt shame at its inappropriateness to himself; and even the sincerity with which his comrades drank his health, could not drown the self-reproaches he was suffering under.

"Thou art an only son, too, Dalton!" said another. "What favours fortune will shower upon one happy fellow! Here am I, one of seven; and, although my father is a Count of the Empire, four of us have to take service in the infantry."

"What of that?" said a dark-complexioned fellow, whose high cheek bones and sharp under-jaw bespoke a Pole. "I am a Second-Lieutenant in the regiment that my grandfather raised and equipped at his own cost; and if I were to lose a thousand florins at 'Lansquenet' to-morrow, I 'd be broke, like the meanest 'Bursch' in the corps."

"It 's better to be a rich Englander," cried one.

"And with a Field-Marshal for a granduncle!" chimed in another.

"And a 'Maria Theresa' to ask for thy grade as officer," said a third.

"It 's a jolly service to all of us," said a young Bohemian, who, although but a Cadet, was a Prince, with a princely fortune. "I ask for nothing but a war to make it the best life going."

"A war with whom?" cried several together.

"What care I with whom or where. With Prussia, if you will, to fight out our old scores about Franconia — with Russia, if you like better, for the Danubian provinces, and her Servian supremacy — with France; she's always ready, with a cause or without one — with Italy; to round off our frontier, and push our limits to the Appennines — I'd say, with England, only Dalton mightn't like it."

"And where would you pick your quarrel with England?" said Frank, laughing.

"Easily enough — through our Ambassador at the Porte, or some outlying station, where Russia is her rival."

"Hang your politics," broke in a Hungarian. "Let us fight when the time comes, but not bother our heads about the cause. I'd rather take my chance of a sabre-cut any day, than addle my brains with too much thought. Here's to you, Dalton — mayst soon be a Rittmeister of Hussars, lad; a prouder thing thou needst not ask for."

"Thou shalt give us a jolly supper at the 'Schwan,' Dalton, when we meet at Vienna," said another.

"And we'll pledge those fair sisters of thine — and they're both handsome, I'll be sworn — in the best Tokay Palfi's vineyard can yield."

"My regiment will be in garrison, in the Leopoldstadt, next month, and I'll remind thee of this pledge."

"And we shall be at Lintz," broke in another; "and thou mayst reckon on me, if I have to suffer an arrest for it afterwards."

"So it is agreed, Dalton, we are thy guests. For what day shall it be?"

"Ay, let us name the day," cried several together.

"When he is named an officer," said Walstein, "that will be time enough."

"Nay, nay — the day month after he arrives at Vienna," cried the Bohemian. "I have given three breakfasts and five suppers on the occasion of my promotion, and the promotion has never come yet."

"The day month after I arrive, then, be it," said Dalton. "We meet at — where is it?"

"The 'Schwan,' lad — the first *restaurant* of Europe. Let men talk as they will of the Cadran Bleu and the Trois Frères, I 'd back Hetzinger's cook against the world; and as for wine, he has Steinkammer at thirty florins the flask! And we'll drink it too — eh, Dalton? and we 'll give a 'Hoch Lebe' to that old grandfather or granduncle of thine. We'll add ten years to his life."

"A poor service to Dalton!" said another; "but here comes Walstein's horses, and now for a last glass together before we part."

The parting seemed, indeed, to be "sweet sorrow," for each leavetaking led to one flask more, friendship itself appearing to make wondrous progress as the bottle went round. The third call of the postilion's bugle — a summons that even German loyalty could scarcely have courage to resist — at last cut short the festivities, and Frank once more found himself in the calèche, where at least a dozen hands contested for the last shake of his, and a shower of good wishes mingled with the sounds of the crashing wheels.

"Glorious fellows!" cried Dalton, in an ecstasy of delight; "such comrades are like brothers."

Walstein smiled at the boy's enthusiasm, and lighted his meerschaum in silence; and thus they journeyed,

each too full of his own thoughts to care for converse. It was not at such a moment that Dalton could give way to dark or serious reflections; the blandishments and caresses of his new friends were too powerful to admit of any rivalry in his mind; and even when he did revert to thoughts of home, it was to picture to himself his father's pride at seeing him in the society of these high-born youths; of Kate's delight at the degree of notice he attracted; and even Nelly — poor Nelly! — he fancied yielding a gentle, half-reluctant assent to a companionship which, if costly and expensive, was sure to be honourable and high-minded.

"What would Hanserl say, too," thought he, "if he saw me seated at the table with those whose high-sounding names are the pride of Austrian chivalry — the Thuns, the Lichtensteins, the Schwartenschilds, and the Walsteins — families old as the Hapsburgs themselves! Little Hanserl, to whom these glorious families were the great lights of history — oh, if he could have set eyes on me this last evening! when, with arms around my neck, they called me comrade!" From this he wandered on to thoughts of his uncle, investing the old Field-Marshal with every noble and soldierlike attribute, and, above all, fancying him as overflowing with affection and kindness. What hosts of questions did he ask about his father and his sisters — how often had he to repeat their names, and paint their resemblances, going over the most minute details of family history, and recounting the simplest incidents of their daily life, for "Uncle Stephen would know all."

In such pleasant fancies he fell fast asleep, even in his dreams to carry out those imaginings that, waking, had no control of reason.

Frank Dalton was awoke from a sound sleep and a pleasant dream of home by the hoarse voice of a mounted Dragoon, ordering the postilion to halt; and, on looking out, he saw that they were drawn up close beside the angle of the great wooden bridge that crosses the Danube, under the walls of Vienna. The whole scene was one of wonderment and surprise to him. At his feet, as it were, rolled the stream of the rapid Danube; its impetuous flood splashing and foaming amid the fragments of ice, floated down from the mountain regions, and which every moment were shivered against the stone breakwaters with the crash of thunder. Beyond the river, rose the fortified walls of the city, covered with a dense multitude of people, eager spectators of a grand military display, which, with all the pomp of war, poured forth beneath the dark archway of the entrance-gate, and, winding over the "glacis," crossed the bridge and held on its course towards the Prater.

It was a clear, bright day of winter; the blue sky almost cloudless, and the sharp outline of every object stood out, crisp and well-defined, in the thin atmosphere. Nothing could be more favourable for the effect of such a spectacle. The bright weapons glanced and glittered like silver — the gay trappings and brilliant uniforms showed in all their splendour — the scarlet Lancers, the blue-clad Hussars, the Cuirassiers, with their towering helmets, vied with each other in soldierlike bearing; while the dense mass of infantry moved along with a surging, waving motion, — like a vast sea heaving with a ground-swell. It was an army complete in every detail — for even to the "ambulances" for the wounded, everything was there!

"A review by the Emperor!" said Walstein; "and see, there comes his Staff." And he pointed to a group of horsemen, whose waving plumes and floating dolmans were seen at a little distance off in the plain.

"Oh, let us follow them!" cried Frank, enthusiastically. "Such a glorious sight as this I never even imagined."

"You'll see enough — perhaps too many such!" said the Count, languidly. "It's a favourite pastime of our old General's, to drag us out of quarters in the very depth of winter, and spend a day in the snow of the Prater."

"Who could have a thought for weather, or hardship, when engaged in such a scene?" said Frank.

"So, evidently, think those worthy Field-Marshals and Generals of Division, who, well mounted, and swathed in furs, canter down to the ground, an hour after we have reached it, and ride back again when they have 'taken the salute,' leaving us to plod wearily home, through wet roads and sloppy streets, to our cold barracks. But just the reverse is the opinion of those poor fellows yonder, with blue faces and frost-bitten knuckles, and who have neither pride in this display, nor sympathy with the success of what is called 'a fine manœuvre.'"

Frank shook his head distrustfully. He wished not to credit the opinion, but knew not how to refute it, and was silent.

"That is the 'Franz Carl,' Dalton," said Walstein, pointing to a column of infantry, who, in their dark grey overcoats, seemed a sad-looking, gloomy mass. "They've got the best band and the most savage Colonel in the service."

Frank gazed at the regiment with a strange sensation of awe and fear.

"There lies my destiny!" thought he. "Who knows what friendships or enmities await me, yonder? What hearts in that dark mass will beat responsively with my own — what sources of sorrow or affliction may I meet with amongst them!"

"I wish thou hadst a better regiment, Dalton," said Walstein.

"How a better? Is it not a brave and distinguished corps?"

"Brave enough," said the other, laughing; "and as for distinction, an Archduke owns and commands it. But that is not what I mean. The regiment is a poor one; the officers are from Upper Austria, with little or no fortune — fellows who dine for a zwanziger, play dominoes for two kreutzers, waltz at the wine-gardens, and fight duels with sabres."

Frank laughed at the description; but his laugh had more of gloom than mirth about it, for he felt at every moment the false position he occupied, and how inextricably complicated his circumstances were becoming. Every allusion to others, showed him in what ligh the was himself regarded. "Was this deception honourable? — was it possible to continue it?" were the questions that would obtrude upon him, and for which no ingenuity could find answer.

"There 's the corps for you, Dalton," said Walstein, drawing his attention to the "Hungarian Guard," all glittering with gold embroidery, and mounted upon the most beautiful white chargers — at once the most perfect riders and the best mounted cavalry in Europe. "In that regiment you are certain of being quartered

either here or in Prague. Those laced jackets are too costly wear to send down to the Banat, or among the wilds of Wallachia. Besides, the Empress likes to see these gaudy fellows on their 'Schimmels' beneath the Palace windows. Your uncle will, of course, grumble a little about the cost; perhaps your father, too, will look a little grave when he hears of six thousand florins for a 'Dolman,' and four for a 'Schabrach;' while ten or twelve horses — the very least you could keep — would scarcely sound like a moderate stable. Still, depend upon it, the corps is as good for service as it is costly, and Creptowitz, their Colonel, is a true Hussar."

For a moment Dalton hesitatad whether he should not make the honest avowal of his narrow fortune, and tell that he had no pretension to such habits of cost and expense; but shame was too powerful to permit the acknowledgment. He had already gone too far to retract, and he felt that any candour now would be the confession of a cheat. If these were harassing and torturing reflections, one flickering ray of hope still glimmered through the gloom; and this was, what he might expect from his uncle. "If he be really rich, as they say," thought Frank; "if his favour be so great with the Emperor, even such a career as this may not be above my prospects." As he resolved these thoughts, he sat with his head buried between his hands, forgetful of where he was and all around him.

"You're losing everything, Dalton," said Walstein. "See, there go the 'Kaiser Jägers,' with their bugles, the finest in the service; and yonder are the Lichtenstein 'Light Horse,' mounted on thorough-bred cattle; and there, to the left, those savage-looking fellows with

long beards, they are the 'Croat Grenadiers.' But here comes the Emperor!" And, as he spoke, one deafening cheer burst forth along the line, and was echoed back from the walls of Vienna; while every band struck up the national hymn of Austria, and the proud notes of "God preserve the Emperor!" floated through the air.

A brilliant staff of Generals of every arm of the service accompanied "the Kaiser;" and Walstein ran quickly over the names of these, many of whom were among the first nobility of the Empire. Some, were the war-worn veterans of the great campaigns; some, the young hopes of Austrian chivalry; but, conspicuous above all, was a figure, whose stature, as well as the singularity of his uniform, attracted Frank's notice. He was a very tall old man, dressed in a uniform of purple velvet slashed with gold, and actually covered with the crosses and decorations of various orders. His cap was a tall chako of red-brown fur, from which a long straight scarlet plume floated, and beneath which his grey hair was fastened in a queue, that hung halfway down his back. Yellow buskins, ornamented with massive gold spurs, completed a costume which seemed almost a compromise between the present and some bygone age.

The figure of the wearer, too, suited well this impression. There was a stern rigidity of look as he sat still and motionless in his saddle, which relaxed into the polished urbanity of an old Courtier as often as the Emperor addressed him. When bowing to the mane of his charger, he seemed the very type of courtesy; while, as he retired his horse, there was all the address and ease of a practised rider.

"There, to the left of Walmoden, on the powerful black horse, do you see that handsome old man in the purple tunic?" asked Walstein.

"I have been watching him for several minutes back," replied Frank. "What a singular uniform!"

"Yes. It was the dress of the Artillery of the Imperial Guards, in the days of Wagram and Lobau; and he is permitted to retain it, by a special leave of the Emperor — a favour he only avails himself of on occasions like the present."

"What a mass of orders he wears!"

"He has all that the Empire can bestow, from the 'Iron Cross,' to the 'Maria Theresa.' He has the 'Legion of Honour,' too, sent him by Napoleon himself! It was that officer who at Elchingen rode up to the head of a French column, and told them that the waggons they were pursuing were the 'ammunition of the rear guard!' 'If you advance,' said he, 'we 'll fire them, and blow you and ourselves to atoms!' The coolness and heroism of the daring were well acknowledged by a brave enemy. The French halted, and our train proceeded on its way. Mayhap you have heard the anecdote before?"

"Never," said Frank, still gazing with admiration at the old soldier.

"Then I may as well tell you that he is the Count Dalton von Auersberg," said Walstein, lying back to enjoy the youth's amazement.

"What! Uncle Stephen? — Is that our uncle?" burst out Frank, in delight.

"I wish I could call him 'ours,' with all my heart," said Walstein, laughing. "Any man might well be proud of such a relative."

But Frank never heard nor heeded the remark; his whole soul was wrapped up in the contemplation of the old Field-Marshal, on whom he gazed as a devotee might have done upon his saint.

"He's like my father," muttered Frank, half aloud; "but haughtier-looking, and older. A true Dalton in every feature! How I long to speak to him — to tell him who I am."

"Not here, though — not here!" said Walstein, laying his hand on the youth's arm, for he almost feared lest he should give way to the sudden impulse. "Were you even the Colonel of your regiment, you could not approach him now."

Frank stared with some surprise at a remark which seemed to treat so slightingly the ties of blood and kindred; while Walstein, by no means easy on the score of his companion's prudence, gave the word to the postilion to drive on; and they entered the city of Vienna.

CHAPTER VII.

The Threat of "A Slight Embarrassment."

The Mazzarini Palace was now a proverb for all that was dissipated and extravagant throughout Florence, and in proportion as the society which frequented it was select and few in number, the more absurd were the rumours that went abroad of its dissipations and excesses. In default of a real good tangible scandal, the world invented a thousand shadowy little slanders, that, if not as deadly to reputation, at once, were just as certain to kill character, in the long run.

Sir Stafford's gout, of which he was confined to his bed or a sofa, was pronounced the lingering agonies of a broken heart. "My Lady's" late dinners were orgies where every licentiousness held sway. George was a reckless gambler, who had already jeopardized all the wealth of his family; and, as for Kate, she was at the mercy of that amiable temperament of the human mind, which always believes the worst, and as constantly draws the darkest inference from its belief.

Now, Sir Stafford was very gouty, very irritable, and very unhappy to boot about a number of matters, which, however deeply interesting to himself, should have had no concern for the world. My Lady did dine at eleven o'clock at night, and the company was assuredly not that from which a discriminating public would have selected Archbishops, or even Minor Ca-

nons, consisting for the most part of that class of which we have already made mention in a former chapter, with now and then some passer-through of rank, or some stray diplomate on his way to or from his post. George Onslow was a large loser at play, but without having recourse to those stratagems for payment which were so generally ascribed to him. While Kate — poor Kate — was neither better nor worse than the reader has hitherto known her.

We do not in this admission seek to conceal the fact that she was very different from what first we saw her. Society had taught her tact, grace, and elegance of deportment. Admiration had rendered her — yes, we say it advisedly — admiration had rendered her very attractive, drawing forth a thousand resources of fascination, and a thousand arts of pleasing, that often wither and die in the cold chill of neglect. The most fastidious critic could not have detected a fault in her manner: an ill-natured one might have objected to what seemed an excess of gracefulness; but even this was relieved by a youthful freshness and buoyancy of temperament, — the last — the very last remnant of her former self.

She was the belle of Florence. Her sovereignty admitted of nothing like a rival. Whether she drove, or rode, or danced, or walked, the same admiring throng surrounded her; some, sincere in all their admiration; others, but following the lead which fashion took; and others, again, watchful observers of a manner in which they fancied they could trace the settled plan of a daring and ambitious character. Vanity had been the foible of her childish years; it was now the vice of her womanhood. Lady Hester ministered to

this failing in a hundred ways. Liking Kate as well as it was possible for her to like anything, she took an intense pleasure in all the admiration she met with.

As an actor is said to "create the part" which is written for him, when he impresses the personation with traits peculiarly his own, so did she fancy that Kate was but a reflected image of all her own graces and fascinations; and probably the proudest days of her own triumphs never yielded more enjoyment than she now felt in the flattering praises bestowed upon Kate Dalton.

There were good-natured people who said that Lady Hester's admiration had another source, and that, as a somewhat *passé* beauty, she knew the full value of a younger and handsomer woman in attracting to her circle and society all that was distinguished by rank or station. We are not prepared to deny some force to this argument, but assuredly it had less weight than other reasons. Lady Hester's own claims, besides, were higher than these detractors admitted. She was, although not very young, still very handsome, her rank and wealth both considerable, and her manner the perfection of that school to which she belonged. If her affection for Kate was only another form of selfishness, it was not the less strong on that account. She was the confidant of her sorrows — by no means a sinecure office; the chief counsellor in all her plans; she was the lay-figure on which she experimented a hundred devices in costume and toilet; and lastly — greatest charm of all — she was a dependant. Not, indeed, that Kate herself so understood her position; pride of family, the Dalton heritage, was

too powerful in her to admit of this. Deeply, sincerely grateful she was for all Lady Hester's kindness; her affection she returned tenfold; but no sense of inferiority mingled with this feeling, save that which arose from her own devoted admiration of her friend.

The homage amid which she passed her life, the unceasing flow of flatteries around her, were not very likely to undeceive on this point. A more respectful devotion could not have waited on a Princess of the royal house. The great Midchikoff gave balls in her honour. The Arab horses of Treviliani were all placed at her disposal. The various visits to objects of curiosity or taste were arranged for her pleasure, and nothing omitted that could tend to stimulate her vanity and heighten her self-esteem.

The utmost we can say for her, all this while, is, that if she was carried away by the excitement of this adulation, yet that, in heart, she was as little corrupted as was well possible. She could not be other than enamoured of a life so unchanging in its happiness, nor could she disconnect the enjoyments around her from the possession of great wealth. She thought of what she had been a few months back: the "same Kate Dalton," braving the snows of a dark German winter, with threadbare cloak and peasant "sabots;" an object of admiration to none except to poor Hanserl, perhaps! And yet now, unchanged, unaltered, save in what gold can change; how different was her position. It had been well if her love of splendour had stopped here. It went, further, however, and inspired a perfect dread of humble fortune.

Over and over again did she hear disparaging remarks bestowed upon the striving efforts of "respec-

table poverty," its contrivances derided, its little straits held up to ridicule. In dress, equipage, or household, whatever it did, was certain to be absurd; and yet all of these people, so laughed at and scorned, were in the enjoyment of means far above her own father's!

What a false position was this! How full of deceit must she become to sustain it! She invoked all her sophistry to assure herself that their condition was a mere passing state; that a some future — perhaps not even a remote one — they should have "their own again;" and that, as in family and descent, they were the equals of any, so they were not inferior in all the just claims to consideration and respect. She tried to think of her father and Nelly moving in the circles she now lived in; but, even alone, and in the secrecy of her own thoughts, her check became scarlet with shame, and she actually shuddered at the very notion. And even Frank, her once ideal of all that was graceful and noble-looking, how would he pass muster beside these essenced "fashionables" who now surrounded her! She endeavoured to console herself by thinking that her father would have despised the lounging, unmanly lives they led; that Ellen would have retired in bashful modesty from a society whose tone of freedom and license would have shocked her; and that Frank would have found no companionship in a class, whose pleasures lay only in dissipation; and yet, all her casuistry could not reassure her. The fascinations amid which she lived were stronger than her reason.

She became first aware of the great change in herself, on recognising how differently a letter from home affected her, to what it had done some months before. At first, she would have hastened to her room, and

locked the door, in an ecstasy of delight to be alone with dearest Nelly — to commune with her own sweet sister in secret — to hang on every line, every word with delight; fancying herself once more with arms clasped around her, or bending down beside her cheek as she leaned over her work-table. How every little detail would move her; how every allusion would bring up home before her, — the snug little chamber of an evening, as the bright fire glowed on the hearth, and Nelly brought out her tools for modelling, while Hanserl was searching for some passage, a line, or a description that Nelly wanted; and then the little discussions that would ensue, as to the shape of some weapon, or the fashion of some costume of a past age, so often broken in upon by her father, whose drolleries would set them laughing!

With what interest, too, she would follow each trifling occurrence of their daily life; the progress Nelly was making in her last group; its difficulties how would she ponder over, and wonder how to meet them! With what eager curiosity would she read the commonest details of household, the dreary burden of a winter's tale! and how her heart bounded to hear of Frank — the soldier — although all the tidings were, that he was with his regiment, but "spoke little of himself or the service."

Now, however, the glow of delight which a letter used to bring up, was changed for a deep blush of anxiety and shame — anxiety, she knew not wherefore or how — of shame, because Nelly's writing on the address was quaint and old-fashioned; while the paper and the seal bespoke the very lowliest acquaintance with epistolary elegance. The letter she used

to grasp at with a high-beating heart, she now clutched with greater eagerness, but in terror lest others should see and mark its vulgar exterior!

How differently, too, did the contents affect her: so long as they referred to herself, in her own latest narratives of her life, she read with avidity and pleasure. Nelly's innocent wonderment was a very delightful sensation; her affectionate participation in her happiness was all grateful; even her gentle warnings against the seductions of such a career, were not unpleasing; but the subject changed to home, and what an alteration came over her spirit! How dark and dismal became the picture — how poverty-stricken each incident and event — what littleness in every detail — how insignificant the occupations that interested them!

How great the surprise she felt, at their interest in such trifles! how astonished that their hopes and fears, their wishes or their dreads, could take so mean a form! This came with peculiar force before her, from a paragraph that closed Nelly's last letter, and which ran thus: —

"Think of our happiness, dearest Kate! We have just seen one who saw you lately — one of your Florence acquaintances; and I believe I might go further, and say friends, for the terms in which he spoke of you evinced sincere and true regard. It was so kind of him to find us out, just to come and tell us about you; indeed, he remained a day here for no other purpose, since his diplomatic duties were urging him to England with speed."

When Kate had read thus far, she stopped; her face and neck crimson with shame, and her heart

beating almost audibly. With lightning rapidity she ran over to herself three or four names of Ministers and Envoys who had lately left Florence, trembling to think it might be the gorgeous Russian, Naradskoi, the princely Neapolitan, Camporese, or the haughty Spaniard, Don Hernandez Orloes, who had visited their humble interior. What a humiliation for her, if she were ever to see them again! Home, at that instant, presented itself before her but as the witness of her shame: how sordid and miserable did its poverty appear, and with what vulgarity associated! Her poor old father, around whose neck, but a moment before, she would have hung with rapture, she shrunk from with very terror: his dress, his look, his accent, — every word he spoke, every allusion he made, were tortures to her; and Nelly — even Nelly — how she blushed to fancy her humble guise, and poor exterior; the little dress of coloured wool, from the pockets of which her carving tools appeared; and then how the scene rose before her! — her father producing Nelly's last work, some little group in clay or wood. She pictured to herself his pride — her sister's bashfulness — the stranger's pretended admiration! 'Till now, these emotions had never seemed a counterfeit. Oh! how she shuddered as her thoughts took more and more the colours of reality, and the room itself, and its poverty-struck furniture, rose before her! At last she read on:

"His visit was of course a great honour, and probably, had he come on any other errand but to speak of you, we should have been half overwhelmed with the condescension; but in very truth, Kate, I quite forgot all his greatness and his grandeur, and lost

sight of his ever holding any higher mission than to bring news of my dearest sister. Papa, of course, asked him to dinner. I believe he would have invited the Czar himself under like circumstances; but, fortunately for us, for him, and perhaps for you too, he was too deaf to hear the request, and politely answered that he would send my letter to you, with pleasure, under his own diplomatic seal; and so we parted. I ought to add, that Mr. Foglass intends speedily to return to Florence."

Three or four times did Kate read this name over before she could persuade herself that she had it aright. Foglass! she had never even heard of him. The name was remarkable enough to remember, as belonging to a person of diplomatic rank, and yet it was quite new to her. She turned to Lady Hester's invitation book, but no such name was there. What form her doubts might have taken there is no knowing, when Mr. Albert Jekyl was seen to cross the court-yard, and enter the house.

Knowing that if any could, he would be the person to resolve the difficulty, she hastened down stairs to meet him.

"Mr. Jekyl," cried she, hurriedly, "is there such a man as Mr. Foglass in this breathing world of ours?"

"Of course there is, Miss Dalton," said he, smiling at her eagerness.

"A Minister or an Envoy at some Court?"

"Not that I have ever heard," repeated he, with a more dubious smile.

"Well, a Secretary of Embassy, perhaps? — a something of that kind? Who is he? — what is he? — where does he belong to?"

"You mean Bob, Miss Dalton," said he, at once puffing out his cheeks and running his hand through his hair, till it became a very good resemblance of the ex-Consul's wig, while, by a slight adjustment of his waistcoat, he imitated the pretentious presence of the mock royalty. "You mean Bob, Madam," said he, mimicking his measured intonation and pompous tone, — "Old Fogey, as Mathews always called me. Mathews and I and Townsend were always together — dined at Greenwich every Sunday regularly. What nights they were! Flows of reason, and feasts of — eh? — yes, that 's what they were."

"I must remind you that I never saw him," said she, laughing; "though I 'm certain, if I should hereafter, it will not be very hard to recognise him. Now, who is he?"

"He himself says, a grandson of George the Fourth. Less interested biographers call him a son of Foglass and Crattles, who, I believe, were not even coachmakers to royalty. He was a Consul at Ezmeroum, or some such place. At least, they showed him the name on a map, and bade him find it out; but he found out something more, it seems — that there was neither pay nor perquisites — neither passports nor peculations; and he has brought back his wisdom once again to besiege the Foreign Office. But how do you happen to ask about him?"

"Some of my friends met him in Germany," said she, hesitatingly. She might have blushed, had Jekyl looked at her; but he knew better, and took pains to bestow his glances in another direction.

"It would be kind to tell them that the man is a most prying, inquisitive sort of creature, who, if he

only had the sense of hearing, would be as mischievous as Purvis."

"I fancy they will see but little of him," said she, with a saucy toss of the head. "He made their acquaintance by affecting to know *me*. I'm sure I've no recollection of having ever seen *him*."

"Of course you never knew him, Miss Dalton?" replied he, with a subdued horror in his voice as he spoke.

"A letter for you, Mademoiselle," said the servant to Kate; "and the man waits for an answer."

Kate broke the seal with some trepidation. She had no correspondents nearer than her home, and wondered what this might mean. It was in a strange commotion of spirit that she read the following lines: —

"Mrs. Montague Ricketts presents her respectful compliments to Miss Dalton, and begs to know at what hour to-day Mrs. M. R. may wait upon Miss D., to present a letter which has been committed to Mrs. R.'s hands for personal delivery. It may secure an earlier hour of audience if Mrs. R. mentions that the precious document is from Miss D.'s father."

What could this possibly mean? It was but that very same day the post brought her a letter from Nelly. Why had not her father said what he wished to say, in that? What need of this roundabout, mysterious mode of communicating?

The sight of the servant still in waiting for the answer recalled her from these cross-questionings, and

she hurried away to consult Lady Hester about the reply.

"It 's very shocking, my dear child," said she, as she listened to the explanation. "The Ricketts, they tell me, is something too dreadful; and we have escaped her hitherto. You couldn't be ill, could you?"

"But the letter?" said Kate, half smiling, half provoked.

"Oh, to be sure — the letter! But Buccellini, you know, might take the letter, and leave it, with unbroken seal, near you; you could read it just as well. I 'm sure I read everything Sir Stafford said in his without ever opening it. You saw that yourself, Kate, or, with your scepticism, I suppose, you 'd not believe it, for you are very sceptical; it is your fault of faults, my dear. D'Esmonde almost shed tears about it, the other day. He told me that you actually refused to believe in the Madonna della Torre, although he showed you the phial with the tears in it!"

"I only said that I had not seen the Virgin shed them," said Kate.

"True, child; but you saw the tears! and you heard D'Esmonde remark, that when you saw the garden of a morning, all soaked with wet, the trees and flowers dripping, you never doubted that it had rained during the night, although you might not have been awake to hear or see it."

Kate was silent; not that she was unprepared with an answer, but dreaded to prolong a discussion so remote from the object of her visit.

"Now, Protestant that I am," said Lady Hester, with the triumphant tone of one who rose above all the slavery of prejudice — "Protestant that I am, I

believe in the 'Torre.' The real distinction to make is, between what is above, and what is contrary to, reason, Kate. Do you understand me, child?"

"I'm sure Mrs. Ricketts' visit must be both," said Kate, adroitly bringing back the original theme.

"Very true; and I was forgetting the dear woman altogether. I suppose you must receive her, Kate; there's no help for it! Say three o'clock, and I'll sit in the small drawing-room, and, with the gallery and the library between us, I shall not hear her dreadful voice."

"Has she such?" asked Kate, innocently.

"I'm sure I don't know," said Lady Hester, pettishly; "but of course she has! Those dreadful people always have! Make the visit as brief as possible, Kate. Let it not be a pretext for anything after. Use your eye-glass on every occasion, so that you can be short-sighted enough never to know her again. I've seen you very supercilious at times, child — it is precisely, the manner for this interview. It was really very wrong of your papa to write in this fashion; or your sister, or whoever it was. Nobody thinks of anything but the post, now-a-days. Pray tell them so; say it makes me quite nervous; you see I *am* nervous to-day. There, there! I don't want to fret you, child — but everything has gone wrong to-day. Midchikoff has given away his box, and I have promised mine to the Lucchesini; and that blonde flounce is much too narrow, so Celestine tells me; but I'm sure she has cut a piece off it to make a 'berthe' for herself. And then the flowers are positively odious. They are crimson, instead of cherry-colour, although I told Jekyl twice over that they ought to be the very

tint of Lady Melgund's nose! There, now; good-by. Remember all I've been saying, and don't forget that this is a 'Giorno infelice,' and everything one does will prove unlucky. I hope D'Esmonde will not come to-day. I'm really not equal to controversy this morning. I should like to see Buccellini, however, and have a globule of the Elysian essence. By-by; do think better about the 'Madonna della Torre,' and get rid of that odious Ricketts' affair as speedily as may be."

With these injunctions, Kate withdrew to indite her reply to Mrs. Ricketts, appointing three o'clock on that same afternoon for a visit, which she assuredly looked forward to with more of curiosity than pleasure.

CHAPTER VIII.

A Convivial Evening.

It is not necessary that the reader should participate in Kate Dalton's mystification regarding her father's letter, that document being simply a piece of Ricketts' strategy, and obtained to secure an admission to the Mazzarini Palace, which, notwithstanding Lord Norwood's assurances, still remained an inpregnable fortress to all her assaults.

Foglass was then commissioned to induce Mr. Dalton to write something — anything, to his daughter, to be transmitted under the Embassy seal — a magnificent mode of conveyance, which was reason enough to call into exercise those powers of penmanship which, since he had ceased to issue promissory notes, had lain in the very rustiest state of disuse. The command to obtain this credential reached Foglass just as he was about to start from Baden; but being desirous, for various little social reasons, to conciliate the Ricketts' esteem, he at once altered his arrangements, and feigning a sudden attack of gout — a right royal malady — he took himself to bed, and sent a few lines to Dalton, detailing his misfortune, and entreating a visit.

Never backward in the cause of good-nature, poor Dalton sallied forth at night, and notwithstanding the cutting blasts of a north wind, and the sharp driftings of the half-frozen snow, held on his way to the "Russie," where, in a very humble chamber for so distin-

guished a guest, lay Mr. Foglass in the mock agonies of gout.

"How devilish kind of you — how very considerate!" said Foglass, as he gave one finger of his hand to shake. "So like poor Townsend, this — Lord Tom we used to call him. Not wet, though, I hope?"

"And if I was, it wouldn't be the first time. But how are you, yourself — where is the pain?"

"You must speak louder; there's a kind of damper on the voice in this room."

"Where's the pain?" screamed Dalton.

"There — there — no need to roar," whispered the other. "The pain is here — over the stomach, round the ribs, the back — everywhere."

"Ah, I know it well," said Dalton, with a wry contortion of the face. It's the devil entirely when it gets under the short ribs! It begins like a rat nibbling you, as it might be, biting away little bits, with now and then a big slice that makes you sing out; and then the teeth begin to get hot, and he bites quicker, and tears you besides — sure I know it, this many a year."

To this description, of which Foglass heard nothing, he bowed blandly, and made a sign to Dalton to be seated near him.

"You'd like a little wine and water, I'm sure," said he, with the air of a man who rarely figured as a host, and liked it more rarely still.

"Spirits and water — boiling water — with sugar and a squeeze of lemon, is what I'll take; and see now, you'd not be worse of the same yourself. I've an elegant receipt for the gout, but whether it's sulphur or saltpetre's in it, I don't well remember; but I know

you mix it with treacle, ash-bark, and earth-worms, the yolk of four eggs, and a little rosemary. But as you mightn't like the taste of it at first, we 'll just begin with a jug of punch."

The waiter had by this time made his appearance, and the order being communicated by a most expressive pantomime of drinking, and the few solitary words of German Dalton possessed, the room assumed a look of sociality to which Dalton's presence very mainly contributed.

In the confidence such a moment of secrecy suggested, Foglass produced an ear-trumpet — a mark of the most unbounded good faith on his part, and which, had Dalton known him better, he would have construed into a proof of implicit reliance on his honour.

"I've been many years at Constantinople," said he, adjusting the instrument, "and the confounded muezzin has made me a little deaf. It 's an everlasting calling to prayers, day and night, there."

"How they ever expect to get to heaven by tormentin' and teazin', is more than I know," said Dalton.

"They 're Mahommedans!" said Foglass, with the air of a man uttering a profound sentiment.

"Aye, to be sure," observed Dalton; "it 's not like Christians. Now, is it true, they tell me they never eat salt meat?"

"Never!"

"Think of that! Not a bit of corned beef, nor as much as a leg of pork —"

"Wouldn't hear of it," interrupted Foglass. "Wine, too, is forbidden."

"And punch?"

"Of course, punch also. A pipe, a cup of coffee,

the bath, and a little opium, are the luxuries of Turkish existence."

"To the devil I fling them all four," cried Dalton, impatiently. "How a man is to be social beside a coffee-pot, or up to his neck in hot water, beats me entirely. Faix! I don't envy the Turks!" And he sipped his glass as he spoke, like one who had fallen upon a happier destiny.

"If you 'll mix me a very small glass of that punch, I 'd like to propose a toast," said Foglass.

"There, now, that 's spoke like a sensible man; pleasant company and social enjoyment are the greatest enemies to the gout. Make your mind easy, and keep your heart light, and the devil a fear but your knees will get limber, and the swellin' will leave your ankles; but weak punch and tiresome people would undhermine the best constitution in the world. Taste that."

To judge from Mr. Foglass's face, Dalton had at least provided one element of health for his companion.

"It is very strong, — very strong, indeed!" said he, puckering up his eyes.

"It 's the fault of the water hereabouts," said Dalton. "It doesn't mix right with the spirits; so that one-half — the first, generally — of your liquor tastes stiff, but the bottom is mild as milk."

The explanation gave such encouragement to Foglass, that he drank away freely, and it was only when he had finished that he remembered his intention of giving a toast.

"Now, Mr. Dalton," said he, as he sat up with a replenished glass in his hand, "I am going to redeem

my pledge, and about to give you the health of the most beautiful girl in Italy — one whose attractions are the theme of every tongue, and whose ambitions may realise any height, or attain any eminence, that she pleases."

"Here 's to you, Kate Dalton," broke in the father, "my own sweet child; and if you only come back to me as you went away, the sorrow better I ask, or grander."

"She will be a Duchess; she may be a Princess if she likes."

"Who knows, — who knows?" said Dalton, as he hung down his head, and hammered away with his spoon at the sugar in his glass.

"Every one knows, every one sees it, Mr. Dalton," said Foglass, authoritatively. "From the Archduke Ernest of Austria to the very pages of the Court, all are her worshippers and admirers. She 'll come back to you with a proud name and a high coronet, Mr. Dalton."

"The devil a better than Dalton ever 't will be! *that* I can tell you. 'T isn't yesterday we took it, the same name; there 's stones in the church-yard of Ballyhack can show who we are; and if she married the — the — God forgive me, I was going to say the Pope, but I meant the Grand Turk — she wouldn't be better than she is now, as Kate Dalton."

"Not better, certainly, but in a more exalted rank; in a position of more recognised distinction," said Foglass, blandly.

"No; nor that neither," cried Dalton, angrily. "The Daltons goes back to the ancient times of all. There 's one of our name in the Bible. I 'm not sure

where, but I believe it 's in the Book of Kings, or may be the Psalms; but wherever it is, he was a real gentleman, living on his own estate, with his livery-servants, and his horses, and everything in good style about him; high on the Grand Jury, — maybe the Sheriff of the county."

Foglass, who had followed this description but imperfectly, could only bow in a deep acknowledgment of what he did not understand.

"The man that marries Kate Dalton isn't doing a piece of condescension, any how! that I can tell him. The dirty acres may slip away from us, but our good blood won't."

"No man has a higher veneration for blood, Sir," said Foglass, proudly; "few men have better reason for the feeling."

"Is Fogles an old stock?" asked Dalton, eagerly.

"Foglass, like Fitzroy, Sir, may mean more than loyalty would dare to avow. My father, Mr. Dalton — but this is a very sad theme with me, let us change it; let us drink to a better feeling in our native land, when that abominable statute may be erased from our code — when that offspring of suspicion and distrust shall no longer be the offence and opprobrium of Englishmen. Here 's to its speedy and everlasting repeal!"

The word was talismanic to Dalton, connected, as it was, in his mind with but one subject. He arose at once, and holding up his goblet in the air, cried out,

"Hip! hip! hurra! three cheers and success to it! Repeal for ever!"

Foglass echoed the sentiment with equal en-

thusiasm, and draining his glass to the bottom, exclaimed,

"Thank you, Dalton! thank you; the heartiness of that cheer tells me we are friends; and although you know not what my feelings are — indeed none can — you can execrate with honest indignation those hateful unions."

"Bad luck to it!" exclaimed Dalton, with energy. "We never had grace nor luck since we saw it!"

"Those petty German sovereigns with their territories the size of Hyde Park!" said Foglass, with intense contempt.

"Just so. The Hessians!" chimed in Dalton, who had a faint consciousness that the other was alluding to the troops of the Electorate, once quartered in Ireland.

"Let us change the topic, Dalton," said Foglass, pathetically, as he wiped his brow like a man dispelling a dark train of thought. "Here 's to that charming young lady I saw last evening, a worthy sister of the beautiful Miss Dalton."

"A better child never breathed," said Dalton, drinking off his glass. "My own poor Nelly," muttered he, below his breath, "'t is better than handsome ye are — true-hearted, and fond of your old father."

"She has accomplishments, Sir, that would realise a fortune; that is," said he, perceiving the dark cloud that passed over Dalton's features — "that is, if she were in a rank of life to need it."

"Yes — very true — just so," stammered out Dalton, not quite sure how to accept the speech. "'T is a fine thing to be able to make money; not that it was

ever the gift of the Daltons. We were real gentlemen to the backbone; and there wasn't one of the name, for five generations — barring Stephen — that could earn sixpence if he was starving."

"But Stephen, what could he do?" inquired Foglass, curious to hear of this singular exception to the family rule.

"He took to soldiering in the Austrian army, and he's a Field-Marshal, and I don't know what more besides, this minute. My son Frank's there now."

"And likes it?"

"Troth, he doesn't say a great deal about that. His letter is mighty short, and tells very little more than where he's quartered — how hard worked he is — and that he never gets a minute to himself, poor fellow!"

"Miss Kate, then, has drawn the prize in the Lottery of Life?" said Foglass, who was anxious to bring the subject back to her.

"Faix! that's as it may be," said the other, thoughtfully. "Her letters is full of high life and great people, grand dances and balls, and the rest of it; but sure, if she's to come back here again and live at home, won't it come mighty strange to her?"

"But in Ireland, when you return there, the society, I conclude, is very good?" asked Foglass, gradually drawing him on to revelations of his future intentions and plans.

"Who knows if I'll ever see it again? The estate has left us. 'T is them Onslows has it now. It might be in worse hands, no doubt; but they've no more right to it than you have."

"No right to it — how do you mean?"

"I mean what I say. That if every one had their own, sorrow an acre of that property would be theirs. 'T is a long story, but if you like to hear it, you 're welcome. It 's more pleasure than pain to me to tell it; though many a man in my situation wouldn't have the heart to go over it."

Foglass pronounced his willingness at once; and a fresh jorum of punch being concocted, Dalton commenced that narrative of his marriage, widowhood, and loss of fortune, of which the reader already knows the chief particulars, and with whose details we need not twice inflict him.

The narrative was a very long one; nor was it rendered more succinct by the manner of the narrator, nor the frequent interruptions to which, for explanation sake, Foglass subjected him. Shall we own, too, that the punch had some share in the intricacy, Dalton's memory and Foglass's perceptions growing gradually more and more nebulous as the evening wore on. Without at all wishing to impugn Dalton's good faith, it must be owned that, what between his occasional reflections, his doubts, guesses, surmises, and suspicions, his speculations as to the reason of this, and the cause of that, it was very difficult for a man so deeply versed in punch as Foglass to carry away anything like a clear notion of the eventful occurrences related. The strength of the potation, the hour, the length of the story, the parenthetical interruptions, — which, although only by-paths, often looked exactly like the high road — and probably, too, certain inaccuracies in the adjustment of the ear-trumpet, which grew to be very difficult at last, — all contributed,

more or less, to a mystification which finally resembled nothing so much as a very confused dream.

Had the worthy ex-Consul then been put on his oath, he couldn't have said whether or not Sir Stafford had murdered the late Mr. Godfrey, or if that crime should be attributed to Dalton's late wife. Between Sir Guy Stafford and Sir Stafford Onslow, he had a vague suspicion of some Siamese bond of union, but that they were cut asunder late in life, and were now drifting in different currents, he also surmised. But which of them "got the fortune," and which had not — who held the estate at present, and how Dalton came to be there at that moment relating the story — were Chinese puzzles to him.

Murder, matrimony, debts, difficulties, and Chancery suits, danced an infernal reel through his brain; and, what with the scattered fragments of Irish life thrown in incidentally, of locking dinner parties, in, and barring the sheriff, out, of being chased by bailiffs, or hunting *them* — all these "divertisements" ending in a residence abroad, with its manifold discomforts and incongruities — poor Foglass was in a state which, were it only to be permanent, would have presented a spectacle of very lamentable insanity.

The nearest approach to a fact that he could come to was, that Dalton ought to be enormously rich, and that now he hadn't a sixpence; that the wealthy Banker was somehow the cause, Count Stephen being not altogether blameless; and that Kate was living a life of extravagance and waste, while her father and sister were waging a hard fight with the very "grimmest" of poverty.

"L'Homme propose," &c., says the adage; and the

poet tells us an instance, that "Those who came to scoff, remained to pray." So in the present case, Mr. Foglass, whose mission was to pump Peter Dalton out of every family secret and circumstance, had opened such an unexpected stream of intelligence upon himself, that he was actually carried away in the flood.

"You've been hardly used, Dalton," said he, at last. "I may say, infamously treated! Not only your fortune taken away, but your children torn from you!"

"Aye, just so." Dalton liked sympathy too well to cavil about his title to it. "True for you, a harder case than mine you'll not hear of in a summer's day. My elegant fine place, my beautiful domain, the seat of my ancestors — or, if they weren't, they were my wife's, and that's all the same — and to be sitting here, in a foreign country, hundreds of miles away from home! Oh, dear! oh, dear! but that's a change!" For an instant the thought overwhelmed him, and he was silent; then, fixing his eyes on Foglass, he added, in a dreamy soliloquy, "Hundreds of miles away from home, drinking bad brandy, with a deaf chap in a red wig for company!"

"I call yours a case of downright oppression, Dalton," resumed the other, who fortunately overheard nothing of the last remark. "If you had been residing in Persia or the Caucasus — even in the Danubian provinces — we'd have made you a case for the Foreign Office. You'd have had your compensation, Sir. Aye, faith! you'd have had a good round sum for the murder of your father — old what's his name? You'd have had your claim, Sir, for the loss of that fine boy the Austrians have taken from you, Mrs. Dalton's wardrobe, and all that sort of thing. I must

repeat my conviction, you've been grossly — infamously treated!"

"And just to think of my own flesh and blood — Stephen, my uncle!"

"I can't think of him, Sir! I can't bear to think of him!" cried Foglass, with enthusiasm.

"A Count of the Empire!" resumed Dalton; "a Field-Marshal, and a something else, with his Maria Theresa!"

"At his age, he might give up those habits," said Foglass, who had converted the Cross of the Empress into a very different relationship.

"And now, there's Kate," said Dalton, who never heard his comment — "there's Kate, my own favourite of them all! thinks no more about us than if we didn't belong to her."

"Living in splendour!" mumbled Foglass. "Boundless extravagance!"

"Just so! Wasting hundreds — flinging the money about like chaff!"

"I saw a ball dress of hers myself, at Madame Fanchone's, that was to cost three thousand francs!"

"Three thousand francs! How am I to bear it at all?" exclaimed Dalton, fiercely. "Will any man tell me how an Irish gentleman, with an embarrassed estate, and in the present times, can meet such extravagance as that? Three thousand francs! and, maybe, for a flimsy rag, that wouldn't stand a shower of rain! Oh, Fogles! you don't know the man that's sitting before you — hale and stout and hearty as he looks — the trials he has gone through, and the troubles he has faced — just for his children. Denying himself every enjoyment in life! (here he sipped his glass)

— giving up every little comfort he was used to! (another sip) — all for his family! Look at my coat; feel the wool of it; see my breeches, 't is like the hide of a bear they are; take notice of my shoes; and there 's my purse, with two florins and eight kreutzers in it; and, may I never see glory, if I don't owe a little bill in every shop that will trust me! And for what? Answer me that. For what?"

Although the savage energy with which this question was put would have extorted an answer from the least willing witness, Foglass was unable to reply, and only stared in mute astonishment.

"I 'll tell you for what, Fogles," resumed Dalton, with a stroke of his clenched fist upon the table — "I 'll you for what! To have a son in the Hussars, and a daughter in all the height of fashion and fine life! That 's it, Fogles. My boy keeping company with all the first people in Austria, hand and glove with — what 's his name? — something like 'Misty' or 'Hazy' — I forget it now — dining, driving, and shooting with them. And my girl, Kate — but sure you know better than myself what style she 's keeping! That 's the reason I 'm what you see me here! — pining away in solitude and small means! All for my children's sake!"

"It is highly meritorious. It does you honour, Dalton," said the other, emphatically.

"Well, I hope it does," said he, with a sigh. "But how few know it, after all!"

"And has this same Sir Stafford never taken any steps towards recompensing you? Has there been nothing like an *amende* for the great losses you 've sustained?"

"Oh, indeed, to do him justice, he made me a kind of an offer once; but you see it was hampered with so many conditions and restrictions, and the like, that I rejected it with contempt. 'No!' says I, ''t isn't poverty will ever make me demean the old family! The Dalton won't suffer disgrace from me!'"

"He could have assisted you without such an alternative, Dalton."

"Maybe he could, indeed!" sighed the other.

"I know it well; the man is one of the richest in England — the head of a great bank besides, making thousands every week."

"I often thought of that," said Dalton. "Sure it would cost him little just to discount a small thing for me at three months. I'd take care to meet it, of course; and he'd never lose a sixpence by me. Indeed, he'd be gaining; for he'd have the commission, and the discount, and the interest, and the devil-knows-what besides of law expenses —"

Here he stopped abruptly, for he had unwittingly strayed into another and very different hypothesis regarding the fate of his bill. However, he pulled up short, tossed off his punch, and said, "I only wish he'd do it!"

"Why not try him, then? — you ought, at least, to give yourself the chance."

"And, if he refused me, I'd have to call him out," said Dalton, gravely; "and just see all the confusion that would lead to. My daughter on a visit there, myself here, and, maybe, obliged to go hundreds of miles to meet him, and no end to the expense, taking a friend with me, too. No, no! that would be too selfish entirely."

"What if you were to throw out a hint, when you write to your daughter. Allude to present pressure for money — speak of tenants in arrear — remittances not arrived."

"Oh, faith! there's no need prompting me about these things," said Dalton, with a bitter laugh. "I know them too well already."

"Write a few lines, then; you'll find paper and pens on that table. I've told you that I will send it under my own seal, with the despatches."

Dalton was very little given to letter-writing at any period, but to encounter the labour at night by candle-light, and after a four hours' carouse, seemed to him quite out of the question. Still, the Embassy seal, whatever that might be, was no common temptation. Perhaps he fancied it to be like one of those portentous appendages which are seen attached to royal grants! Who can tell what amount of wax and ribbon his imagination bestowed upon it! Beside this, there was another motive — never again, perhaps, should he be able to write without Nelly's knowledge. This consideration decided the question at once. Accordingly he put on his spectacles, and seated himself gravely to the work, which proceeded thus: —

"Dear Kate, —

"I'm spending the evening with your friend the Ambassador of —, I forget where — Fogles is his name — and as pleasant a man as I ever met; and he sends his regards to you and all the family, and transmits this under his own seal. Things is going on bad enough here. Not a shilling out of Crognoborraghan. Healey ran away with the November rent

and the crops, and Sweeney's got into the place, and won't give it up to any one without he gets forty pound! I'd give him forty of my teeth as soon, if I had them! Ryan shot Mr. Johnson coming home from work, and will be hanged on Saturday; and that's in our favour, as he was a life in Honan's lease. There's no money in Ireland, Kellet tells me, and there's none here. Where the blazes is it all gone to? Maybe, like the potatoes, 't is dying out!

"Frank's well sick of soldiering; they chained him up like a dog, with his hand to his leg, the other night for going to the play; and if he wasn't a born gentleman, he says, they'd have given him 'four-and-twenty,' as he calls it, with a stick for impudence. Stephen's no more good to him than an old umbrella — never gave him bit nor sup! Bad luck to the old Neygur — I can't speak of him.

"Nelly goes on carving and cutting away as before. There's not a Saint in the calendar she didn't make out of rotten wood this winter, and little Hans buys them all, at a fair price, she says; but I call a Holy Family cheap at ten florins, and 't is giving the Virgin away to sell her for a Prussian dollar. 'T is a nice way for one of the Daltons to be living — by her own industry!

"I often wish for you back here; but I'd be sorry, after all, ye'd come, for the place is poorer than ever, and you're in good quarters, and snug where you are.

"Tell me how they treat you — if they're as kind as before — and how is the old man, and is the gout bad with him still. I send you in this a little bill Martin Cox, of Drumsnagh, inclosed me for sixty-

two ten-and-eight — could you get the old Baronet to put his name on it for me; tell him 't is as good as the bank paper, that Cox is as respectable a man as any in Leitrim, and an estated gentleman, like myself, and of course that we 'll take care to have the cash ready for it when due. This will be a great convenience to me, and Fogles says it will be a pleasure to Sir Stafford, besides extending his connexion among Irish gentlemen. If he seems to like the notion, say that your father is well known in Ireland, and can help him to a very lively business in the same way. Indeed, I 'd have been a fortune to him myself, alone, if he had the discounting of me for the last fifteen years!

"Never mind this, however, for bragging is not genteel; but get me his name, and send me the 'bit of stiff' by return of post.

"If he wants to be civil, maybe, he 'll put it into the bank himself, and send me the money; and if so, let the order be on Haller and Oelcher, for I 've a long account with Koch and Elz, and maybe they 'd keep a grip of the cash, and I 'd just be where I was before.

"If I can get out of this next spring it would be a great economy, for I owe something to everybody, and a new place always gives courage.

"I 'm hesitating whether I 'll go to Genoa or New York, but cheapness will decide me, for I only live now for my family.

"With all my affection, believe me your fond father,

"PETER DALTON.

"P. S. — If Sir S. would rather have my own acceptance, let him draw for a hundred, at three months, and I 'm ready; but don't disappoint me, one way or other. Wood is fifteen florins a 'klafter' here, now, and I 've nobody to cut it when it comes home, as Andy took a slice out of his shin on Friday last with the hatchet, and is in bed ever since. Vegetables, too, is dear; and since Frank went, we never see a bit of game.

"2nd P. S. — If you had such a thing as a warm winter cloak that you didn't want, you might send it to Nelly. She goes out in a thing like a bit of brown paper, and the wooden shoes is mighty unhandy with her lameness.

"Mind the bill."

"You are writing a rather lengthy despatch, Dalton," said Foglass, who had twice dozed off to sleep, and woke again, only to see him still occupied with his epistle.

"It 's done now," said Dalton, with a sigh; for, without well knowing why, he was not quite satisfied with the performance.

"I wish you 'd just add a line, to say that Mrs. Ricketts — Mrs. Major-General Ricketts, who resides at Florence, is so desirous to know her. You can mention that she is one of the first people, but so exclusive about acquaintance, that it is almost impossible to get presented to her, but that this coming winter the Embassy will, in all likelihood, open a door to so very desirable an object."

"Lady Hester will know her, of course?" said Dalton, whose sense of proprieties was usually clear

enough when selfishness did not interfere, "and I don't see that my daughter should extend her acquaintance through any other channel."

"Oh, very true; it 's of no consequence. I only meant it as an attention to Miss Dalton; but your observation is very just," said Foglass, who suddenly felt that he was on dangerous ground.

"Depend upon 't, Fogles, my daughter is in the best society of the place, whatever it is. It 's not a Dalton would be left out."

Foglass repeated his most implicit conviction in this belief, and did all in his power to efface the memory of the suggestion; but without success. Family pride was a kind of birdlime with old Dalton, and if he but touched, he could not leave it. The consequences, however, went no further than a long and intricate dissertation on the Dalton blood for several centuries back, through which Foglass slept just as soundly as the respected individuals there recorded, and was only awoke at last by Dalton rising to take leave — an event at last suggested by the empty decanter.

"And now, Fogles," said he, summing up, "you 'll not wonder, that if we 're poor we 're proud. I suppose you never heard of a better stock than that since you were born?"

"Never, by Jove! Guelphs, Ghibellines, and Hapsburghs, are nothing to them. Good night — good night. I'll take care of your letter. It shall go to-morrow, in the Embassy-bag."

CHAPTER IX.

An Invasion.

To afford the reader the explanation contained in the preceding chapter, we have been obliged to leave Kate Dalton waiting, in mingled anxiety and suspense, for the hour of Mrs. Ricketts' visit. Although her mind principally dwelt upon the letter which had been announced as coming from her father — an event so strange as naturally to cause astonishment — she also occasionally recurred to the awkwardness of receiving persons whom Lady Hester had so scrupulously avoided, and being involved in an acquaintanceship so unequivocally pronounced vulgar. A few short months before, and the incident would have worn a very different aspect to her eyes. She would have dwelt alone on the kindness of one, an utter stranger, addressing her in terms of respectful civility, and proffering the intention of a visit. She would have been grateful for the good-nature that took charge of a communication for her. She would have viewed the whole as a sort of flattering notice, and never dreamed of that long catalogue of "inconveniences" and annoyances, so prolifically associated with the event as it at present stood. She was greatly changed in many respects. She had been daily accustomed to hear the most outrageous moral derelictions lightly treated, or at least but slightly censured. For every fault and failing there was a skilful excuse or a charitable explanation.

The errors of the fashionable world were shown to be few, insignificant, and venial; and the code showed no exception to the rule that "well-bred people can do no wrong;" vulgarity alone was criminal; and the sins of the underbred admitted of no palliation. Her sense of justice might have revolted against such judgments, had reason been ever appealed to; but such was not the case. Ridicule alone was the arbiter: whatever could be scoffed at was detestable; and a solecism in dress, accent, or demeanour, were higher crimes than many a grave transgression or glaring iniquity.

The little mimicries of Albert Jekyl, as he described Mrs. Ricketts — the few depreciatory remarks of Lady Hester concerning her — would have outweighed her worth had her character been a cornucopia of goodness. It was, then, in no pleasant flurry of spirits that, just as the clock struck three, Kate heard the heavy door of the Palace flung wide, and the sound of wheels echo beneath the vaulted entrance. The next moment, a small one-horse phaeton, driven by a very meagre servant in a tawdry livery, passed into the court-yard, having deposited its company in the hall.

There had been a time, and that not so very far back, neither, when the sight of that humble equipage, with visitors, would have made her heart beat to the full as strong, albeit with very different emotions. Now, however, she actually glanced at the windows to see if it had attracted notice, with a kind of terror at the ridicule it would excite. Never did she think an old grey horse could be so ugly — never did wheels make so intolerable a noise before! Why would people dress up their servants like harlequins? — what

was the meaning of that leopard-skin rug for the feet? It was an odious little vehicle altogether. There was a tawdry, smirking, self-satisfied pretension about its poverty, that made one wish for a break down on looking at it!

"Mrs. Montague Ricketts and Miss Ricketts," said a very demure-looking Groom of the Chambers; and although his features were immaculate in their expression of respect, Kate felt offended at what she thought was a flippancy in the man's manner.

Although the announcement was thus made, the high and mighty personages were still three rooms off, and visible only in the dim distance, coming slowly forward.

Leaning on her sister's arm, and with a step at once graceful and commanding, Mrs. Ricketts came on. At least, so Kate judged an enormous pyramid of crimson velvet and ermine to be, from the summit of which waved a sufficiency of plumes for a moderate hearse. The size and dignity of this imposing figure almost entirely eclipsed poor Martha, and completely shut out the slender proportions of Mr. Scroope Purvis, who, from being loaded like a sumpter-mule with various articles for the road, was passed over by the Groom of the Chambers, and believed to be a servant. Slow as was the order of march, Purvis made it still slower, by momentarily dropping some of the articles with which he was charged; and as they comprised a footstool, a poodle, two parasols, an album, a smelling-bottle, a lorgnette, with various cushions, shawls, and a portable firescreen, his difficulties may be rather compassionated than censured.

"Scroope, how can you? Martha, do speak to

him. It 's down again. He 'll smash my lorgnette, — he 'll smother Fidèle. How very awkward — how absurd we shall look!" Such were the *sotto voce* accompaniments that filled up the intervals till they arrived at the great drawing-room, where Kate Dalton sat.

If the reader has ever watched a great tragedy queen emerging from the flats, when, after a lively dialogue with the prompter, and the utterance of a pleasant jest, she issues forth upon the open stage, to vent the sorrows or the wrongs of injured womanhood, he may form some faint idea of the rapid transformation that Mrs. Ricketts underwent as she passed the door-sill. Her first movement was a sudden bound forwards, or, at least, such an approach to a spring as a body so imposing could accomplish, and then, throwing her arms wide, she seemed as if about to enclose Miss Dalton in a fast embrace; and so, doubtless, had she done, if Kate had responded to the sign. A deep, and very formal curtsey was, however, her only acknowledgment of this spontaneous burst of feeling, and Mrs. Ricketts, like a skilful General, at once changing her plan of attack, converted her ardour into astonishment, and exclaimed,

"Did you ever see such a resemblance! Could you believe it possible, Martha? A thousand apologies, my dear Miss Dalton, for this rudeness; but you are so wonderfully like our dear, dear friend, Lady Caroline Montressor, that I actually forgot myself. Pray forgive me, and let me present my sister, Miss Ricketts. My brother, Mr. Scroope Purvis, Miss Dalton."

The ceremonial of introduction over, and Mrs. Ricketts being at last seated — a very tedious opera-

tion, in which the arrangement of cushions, pillows, and footstools, played a conspicuous part — that bland lady began, in her very softest of voices:

"This, indeed, repays me ;— amply, fully repays me! — eh, Martha?"

"Quite so, sister," responded Martha, in a meek whisper.

"A poor invalid as I am, rarely rising from a sofa except to snatch the perfumed odours of a violet in spring, or to listen to the murmurs of a rippling fountain; denied all the excitements of society by a nervous temperament, so finely strung as to be jarred by contact, even the remotest, with inferior souls — think of what ecstasy a moment like this affords me!"

As Kate was profoundly ignorant to what happy combination of circumstances this blissful state could be attributed, she could only smile courteously, and mutter some vague expressions of her pleasure, satisfaction, and so forth.

"Eve in her own paradise!" exclaimed Mrs. Ricketts, as she turned her eyes from Kate to the gorgeous chamber in which they were seated. "May I ask if the taste of these decorations be yours, Miss Dalton?"

"Lady Hester Onslow's, Madam," said Kate, quietly.

"I declare, I like these hangings better than 'Gobelins' — they are lighter, and more graceful. You remember, Martha, I told the dear Queen of Saxony that blue velvet would go so well with her small pictures. We discussed the point every morning at breakfast for a week, and the poor dear King at last called us the 'blue devils;' — very happy, wasn't it, Miss Dalton? But he speaks English just like one of ourselves."

"These are all Dutch pictures, I perceive," said

Purvis, who, with his poodle under his arm, was making a tour of the room, peering into everything, opening books, prying into china jars, and spying into work-boxes, as though in search of some missing article.

"I 'm tired of Wou — Wou — Wou —" Here the poodle barked, doubtless in the belief that he was responding to an invitation. "Down, Fidèle! Wou — vermans," gulped out Purvis. "He 's always the same."

"But those dear white palfreys, how I love them! I always have a white horse, out of regard for Wouvermans."

Kate thought of the poor grey in the court-yard, and said nothing.

"And there is something so touching — so exquisitely touching — in those Flemish interiors, where the good wife is seated reading, and a straggling sunbeam comes slanting in upon the tiled floor. Little peeps of life, as it were, in a class of which we know nothing; for really, Miss Dalton, in our order, sympathies are too much fettered; and I often think it would be better that we knew more of the middle classes! When I say this, of course I do not mean as associates — far less as intimates — but as ingredients in the grand scheme of universal nature."

"'The no — no — noblest study of man — mankind is' — what is it, sister?"

"'Man,' Scroope; but the poet intended to refer to the great aims and objects of our being. Don't you think so, Miss Dalton? It was not man in the little cares of every-day life, in his social relations, but man

in his destinies, in his vast future, when he goes beyond 'that bourne —'"

"From which nobody ever got out again," cackled Purvis, in an ecstasy at the readiness of his quotation.

"'From which no traveller returns,' Scroope, is, I believe, the more correct version."

"Then it don't mean pur — pur — pur — purgatory," gulped Scroope, who, as soon as the word was uttered, became shocked at what he said.

"I forgot you were a Ro — Ro — Roman, Miss Dalton," said he, blushing.

"You are in error, Scroope," said Mrs. Ricketts. "Miss Dalton is one of ourselves. All the distinguished Irish are of the reformed faith."

"I am a Catholic, Madam," said Kate, not knowing whether to be more amused or annoyed at the turn the conversation had taken.

"I knew it," cried Purvis, in delight. "I tracked your carriage to the D — D — Duomo, and I went in after you, and saw you at the co — co — co — co — "

"Corner," whispered Martha, who, from his agonies, grew afraid of a fit.

"No, not the corner, but the co — co — co — confessional — confessional, where you stayed for an hour and forty minutes by my own watch; and I couldn't help thinking that your pec — pec — pec — peccadilloes were a good long score, by the time it took to — to — to — tell them."

"Thanks, Sir," said Kate, bowing, and with difficulty restraining her laughter; "thanks, for the very kind interest you seem to have taken in my spiritual welfare."

"Would that I might be suffered a participation in

that charge, Miss Dalton," cried Mrs. Ricketts, with enthusiasm, "and allowed to hold some converse with you on doctrinal questions."

"Try her with the Posers, sister," whispered Purvis.

"Hush, Scroope. Mere opportunities of friendly discussion, nothing more I ask for, Miss Dalton."

"Give her the Posers," whispered Purvis, louder.

"Be quiet, Scroope. I have been fortunate enough to resolve the doubts of more than one ere this. That dear angel, the Princess Ethelinda of Cobourg, I believe I may say, owes her present enlightenment to our sweet evenings together."

"Begin with the Posers."

"Hush! I say, Scroope."

"May I ask," said Kate, "what is the suggestion Mr. Purvis has been good enough to repeat."

"That I should give you this little tract, Miss Dalton," said Mrs. Ricketts, as she drew out a miscellaneous assemblage of articles from a deep pocket, and selected from the mass a small blue-covered pamphlet, bearing the title, 'Three Posers for Papists,' by M. R."

"Montgomery Ricketts," said Purvis, proudly; "she wrote it herself, and the Pope won't let us into Rome in consequence. It's very droll, too; and the part about the — the — Vir — gin —"

"You will, I'm sure, excuse me, Madam," said Kate, "if I beg that this subject be suffered to drop. My thanks for the interest this gentleman and yourself have vouchsafed me will only be more lasting by leaving the impression of them unassociated with anything unpleasing. You were good enough to say that you had a letter for me?"

"A letter from your father — that dear, fond father, who doats so distractingly upon you, and who really seems to live but to enjoy your triumphs. Martha, where is the letter?"

"I gave it to Scroope, sister."

"No, you didn't. I never saw —"

"Yes, Scroope, I gave it to you, at the drawing-room fire —"

"Yes, to be sure, and I put it into the ca — ca — ca —"

"Not the candle, I hope," cried Kate, in terror.

"No, into the card-rack; and there it is now."

"How provoking!" cried Mrs. Ricketts; "but you shall have it to-morrow, Miss Dalton. I'll leave it here myself."

"Shall I appear impatient, Madam, if I send for it this evening."

"Of course not, my dear Miss Dalton; but shall I commit the precious charge to a menial's hand?"

"You may do so with safety, Madam," said Kate, not without a slight irritation of manner as she spoke.

"Mr. Foglass, the late Minister and Envoy at —"

Here a tremendous crash, followed by a terrific yelping noise, broke in upon the colloquy; for it was Fidèle had thrown down a Sevres jar, and lay, half-buried and howling, under the ruins. There was, of course, a general rising of the company, some to rescue the struggling poodle, and others in vain solicitude to gather up the broken fragments of the once beautiful vase. It was a favourite object with Lady Hester; of singular rarity, both for form and design; and Kate stood speechless, and almost sick with shame

and sorrow, at the sight, not heeding one syllable of the excuses and apologies poured in upon her, nor of the equally valueless assurances that it could be easily mended; that Martha was a perfect proficient in such arts; and that, if Scroope would only collect the pieces carefully, the most difficult connoisseur would not be able to detect a flaw in it.

"I've got a head here; but the no — nose is off," cried Purvis.

"Here it is, Scroope. I've found it."

"No, that's a toe," said he; "there's a nail to it."

"I am getting ill — I shall faint," said Mrs. Ricketts, retiring upon a well-cushioned sofa from the calamity.

Martha now flew to the bell-rope and pulled it violently, while Purvis threw open the window, and with such rash haste as to upset a stand of camelias, thereby scattering plants, buds, earth, and crockery over the floor, while poor Kate, thunderstruck at the avalanche of ruin around her, leaned against the wall for support, unable to stir or even speak. As Martha continued to tug away at the bell, the alarm, suggesting the idea of fire, brought three or four servants to the door together.

"Madeira! quick, Madeira!" cried Martha, as she unloosed various articles of dress from her sister's throat, and prepared a plan of operations for resuscitation that showed at least an experienced hand.

"Bring wine," said Kate, faintly, to the astonished Butler, who, not noticing Miss Ricketts' order, seemed to await hers.

"Madeira! it must be Madeira!" cried Martha, mildly.

"She don't dislike Mar — Mar — Marco-brunner," whispered Purvis to the servant, "and I 'll take a glass too."

Had the irruption been one of veritable housebreakers, had the occasion been what newspapers stereotype as a "Daring Burglary," Kate Dalton might, in all likelihood, have distinguished herself as a heroine. She would, it is more than probable, have evinced no deficiency either of courage or presence of mind, but in the actual contingency nothing could be more utterly helpless than she proved; and, as she glided into a chair, her pale face and trembling features betrayed more decisive signs of suffering than the massive countenance which Martha was now deluging with eau de cologne and lavender.

The wine soon made its appearance — a very imposing array of restoratives — the ambulatory pharmacopœia of the Ricketts' family, was all displayed upon a table. Martha, divested of shawl, bonnet, and gloves, stood ready for action; and thus, everything being in readiness, Mrs. Ricketts, whose consideration never suffered her to take people unawares, now began her nervous attack in all form.

If ague — hysterics — recovery from drowning — tic-douloreux, and an extensive burn, had all sent representatives of their peculiar agonies, with injunctions to struggle for a mastery of expression, the symptoms could scarcely have equalled those now exhibited. There was not a contortion nor convulsion that her countenance did not undergo, while the devil's tattoo kept up by her heels upon the floor, and her knuckles occasionally on the table, and now and then on Scroope's head, added fearfully to the effect of her

screams, which varied from the deep groan of the melodrame to the wildest shrieks of tragedy.

"There 's no danger, Miss Dalton," whispered Martha, whose functions of hand-rubbing, temple-bathing, wine-giving, and so forth, were performed with a most jog-trot regularity.

"When she sc — sc — screams, she 's all right," added Purvis; and, certainly, the most anxious friend might have been comforted on the present occasion.

"Shall I not send for a Physician?" asked Kate, eagerly.

"On no account, Miss Dalton. We are quite accustomed to these seizures. My dear sister's nerves are so susceptible."

"Yes," said Scroope, who, be it remarked, had already half finished a bottle of hock, "poor Zoe is all sensibility — the scabbard too sharp for the sword. Won't you have a glass of wine, Miss Dalton?"

"Thanks, Sir, I take none. I trust she is better now — she looks easier."

"She is better; but this is the difficult moment," whispered Martha. "Any shock — any sudden impression now, might prove fatal."

"What is to be done, then?" said Kate, in terror.

"She must be put to bed at once, the room darkened, and the strictest silence preserved. Can you spare your room?"

"Oh, of course, anything — everything at such a moment," cried the terrified girl, whose reason was now completely mastered by her fears.

"She must be carried. Will you give orders, Miss Dalton; and Scroope, step down to the carriage, and

bring up —" Here Miss Ricketts' voice degenerated into an inaudible whisper; but Scroope left the room to obey the command.

Her sympathy for suffering had so thoroughly occupied Kate, that all the train of unpleasant consequences that were to follow this unhappy incident had never once occurred to her; nor did a thought of Lady Hester cross her mind, 'till, suddenly, the whole flashed upon her, by the appearance of her maid Nina in the drawing-room.

"To your own room, Mademoiselle?" asked she, with a look that said far more than any words.

"Yes, Nina," whispered she. "What can I do? She is so ill! They tell me it may be dangerous, at any moment, and —"

"Hush, my dear Miss Dalton!" said Martha; "one word may wake her."

"I'd be a butterfly!" warbled the sick lady, in a low, weak treble; while a smile of angelic beatitude beamed on her features.

"Hush! be still!" said Martha, motioning the surrounders to silence.

"What shall I do, Nina? Shall I go and speak to my Lady?" asked Kate.

A significant shrug of the shoulders, more negative than affirmative, was the only answer.

"I'd be a gossamer, and you'd be the King of Thebes," said Mrs. Ricketts, addressing a tall footman, who stood ready to assist in carrying her.

"Yes, Madam," said he, respectfully.

"She's worse," whispered Martha, gravely.

"And we'll walk on the wall of China by moonlight, with Cleopatra and Mr. Cobden."

"Certainly, Madam," said the man, who felt the question too direct for evasion.

"Has she been working slippers for the planet Ju — Ju — Jupiter, yet?" asked Purvis, eagerly, as he entered the room, heated and flushed from the weight of a portentous bag of coloured wool.

"No; not yet," whispered Martha. "You may lift her now, gently — very gently, and not a word."

And in strict obedience, the servants raised their fair burden, and bore her from the room, after Nina, who led the way with an air that betokened a more than common indifference to human suffering.

"When she gets at Ju — Jupiter," said Purvis to Kate, as they closed the procession, "it 's a bad symptom; or when she fancies she 's Hec — Hec — Hec — Hec —"

"Hecate?"

"No; not Hec — Hecate, but Hecuba — Hecuba; then it 's a month, at least, before she comes round."

"How dreadful!" cried Kate. And certainly there was not a grain of hypocrisy in the fervour with which she uttered it.

"I don't think she 'll go beyond the San — Sandwich Islands this time, however," added he, consolingly.

"Hush, Scroope!" cried Martha. And now they entered the small and exquisitely furnished dressing-room which was appropriated to Kate's use; within which, and opening upon a small orangery, stood her bedroom.

Nina, who scrupulously obeyed every order of her

young mistress, continued the while to exhibit a hundred petty signs of mute rebellion.

"Lady Hester wishes to see Miss Dalton," said a servant at the outer door.

"Can you permit me for a moment?" asked Kate, in a tremor.

"Oh, of course, my dear Miss Dalton; let there be no ceremony with us," said Martha. "Your kindness makes us feel like old friends already."

"I feel myself quite at home," cried Scroope, whose head was not proof against so much wine; and then, turning to one of the servants, he added a mild request for the two bottles that were left on the drawing-room table.

Martha happily, however, overheard and revoked the order. And now the various attendants withdrew, leaving the family to themselves.

It was in no pleasant mood that Kate took her way towards Lady Hester's apartment. The drawing-room, as she passed through it, still exhibited some of the signs of its recent ruin, and the servants were busied in collecting fragments of porcelain and flower-pots. Their murmured comments, hushed as she went by, told her how the occurrence was already the gossip of the household. It was impossible for her not to connect herself with the whole misfortune. But for her! — But she could not endure the thought, and it was with deep humiliation and trembling in every limb that she entered Lady Hester's chamber.

"Leave me, Celadon; I want to speak to Miss Dalton," said Lady Hester to the Hairdresser, who had just completed one-half of her Ladyship's *chevelure*, leaving the other side pinned and rolled up in those

various preparatory stages, which have more of promise than picturesque about them. Her cheek was flushed, and her eyes sparkled with an animation that betrayed more passion than pleasure.

"What is this dreadful story I've heard, child, and that the house is full of? Is it possible there can be any truth in it? Have these odious people actually dared to establish themselves here? Tell me, child — speak!"

"Mrs. Ricketts became suddenly ill," said Kate, trembling; "her dog threw down a china jar."

"Not my Sevres jar? — not the large green one, with the figures?"

"I grieve to say it was!"

"Go on. What then?" said Lady Hester, dryly.

"Shocked at the incident, and alarmed, besides, by the fall of a flower-stand, she fainted away, and subsequently was seized with what I supposed to be a convulsive attack, but to which her friends seemed perfectly accustomed, and pronounced not dangerous. In this dilemma they asked me if they might occupy my room. Of course I could not refuse, and yet felt, the while, that I had no right to extend the hospitality of this house. I saw the indelicacy of what I was doing. I was shocked and ashamed, and yet —"

"Go on," said Lady Hester once more, and with a stern quietude of manner that Kate felt more acutely than even an angry burst of temper.

"I have little more to say; in fact, I know not what I am saying," cried she, gulping to repress the torrent of suffering that was struggling within her.

"Miss Dalton," began Lady Hester —

"Oh! why not Kate?" broke she in with a choking utterance.

"Miss Dalton," resumed Lady Hester, and as if not hearing the entreaty, "very little knowledge of that world you have lived in for the past three or four months might have taught you some slight self-possession in difficulty. Still less acquaintance with it might have suggested the recollection that these people are no intimates of mine; so that, even were tact wanting, feeling, at least, should have dictated a line of action to you."

"I know I have done wrong. I knew it at the time, and yet, in my inexperience, I could not decide on anything. My memory, too, helped to mislead me, for I bethought me, that although these persons were not of your own rank and station, that yet you had stooped lower than them when you came to visit Nelly and myself."

"Humph!" ejaculated Lady Hester, and with a gesture that very unequivocally seemed to say, that her having done so was a grievous error. Kate saw it quickly, and as suddenly the blood rushed to her cheek, colouring her throat and neck with the deep crimson of shame. A burst of pride — the old Dalton pride — seemed to have given way within her; and, as she drew herself up to her full height, her look and attitude wore every sign of haughty indignation.

Lady Hester looked at her for a few seconds, with a glance of searching import. Perhaps, for a moment, the possibility of a deception struck her, and that this might only be feigned; but as suddenly did she recognise the unerring traits of truth, and said,

"What! child, are you angry with *me?*"

"Oh, no, no," said Kate, bursting into tears, and kissing the hand that was now extended towards her — "Oh, no, no! but I could hate myself for what seems so like ingratitude."

"Come, sit down here at my feet, on this stool, and tell me all about it; for, after all, I could forgive them the jar and the camelias, if they 'd only have gone away afterwards. And of course the lesson will not be thrown away upon you — not to be easily deceived again."

"How, deceived!" exclaimed Kate. "She was very ill. I saw it myself."

"Nonsense, child. The trick is the very stalest piece of roguery going. Since Toe Morris, as they call him — the man that treads upon people, and by his apologies scrapes acquaintance with them — there is nothing less original. Why, just before we left England, there was old Bankhead got into Slingsby House, merely because the newspapers might announce his death at the Earl of Grindleton's — 'On the eighth, of a few days' illness, deeply regretted by the Noble Lord, with whom he was on a visit.' Now, that dear Ricketts woman would almost consent to take leave of the world for a similar paragraph. I 'm sure I should know nothing of such people, but that Sir Stafford's relations have somewhat enlightened me. He has a nest of cousins down in Shropshire, not a whit better than your — I was going to call them 'your friends,' the Ricketts."

"It is almost incredible to suppose this could be artifice."

"Why so, child? There is no strategy too deep for people who are always aspiring to some society

above them. Besides, after all, I was in a measure prepared for this."

"Prepared for it!"

"Yes; Jekyl told me, that if they once got in, it would be next to impossible to keep them out, afterwards. A compromise, he said, was the best thing; to let them have so many days each year, with certain small privileges about showing the house to strangers, cutting bouquets, and so on; or, if we preferred it, let them carry away a Teniers or a Gerard Dow to copy, and take care never to ask for it. He inclined to the latter as the better plan, because, after a certain lapse of time, it can end in a cut."

"But this is inconceivable!" exclaimed Kate.

"And yet, half the absurd and incongruous intimacies one sees in the world, have had some such origin; and habit will reconcile one to acquaintance that at first inspired feelings of abhorrence and detestation. I'm sure I don't know one good house in town where there are not certain intimates that have not the slightest pretension, either from rank, wealth, distinction, or social qualities, to be there. And yet, there they are; not merely as supernumeraries, either, but very prominent and foreground figures, giving advice, and offering counsel on questions of family policy, and writing their vulgar names on every will, codicil, marriage-settlement, and trust-deed, 'till they seem to be part of the genealogical tree, to which, after all, they are only attached like fungi. You look very unhappy, my poor Kate, at all this; but, believe me, the system will outlive both of us. And so, now to your room, and dress for dinner. But I forgot; you hav'n't got a room; so Celestine must give you

hers, and you will be close beside me, and we shall be the better able to concert measures about these Ricketts folk, who really resemble those amiable peasants your father told me of, on his Irish property, and whom he designated as 'Squatters.' I'm delighted that I hav'n't forgot the word."

And thus, chatting on, Lady Hester restored Kate's wonted happiness of nature, sadly shaken as it had been by the contrarieties of the morning. Nothing, too, was easier than to make her forget a source of irritation. Ever better satisfied to look on the bright side of life, her inclinations needed but little aid from conviction to turn her from gloomy themes to pleasant ones; and already some of the absurdities of the morning were recurring to her mind, and little traits of Mrs. Ricketts and her brother were involuntarily coming up through all the whirlpool of annoyance and confusion in which they had been submerged.

The coming dinner, too, engrossed some share of her thoughts; for it was a grand entertainment, to which all Lady Hester's most distinguished friends were invited. An Archduke and a Cardinal were to make part of the company, and Kate looked forward to meeting these great personages with no common interest. It was less the vulgar curiosity of observing the manners and bearing of distinguished characters, than the delight she felt in following out some child-invented narrative of her future life — some fancied story of her own career, wherein Princes and Prelates were to figure, and scenes of splendour and enjoyment to follow each other in rapid succession.

CHAPTER X.

The Conclusion of a "Grand Dinner"

Lady Hester's dinner of that day was a "grand one," — that is to say, it was one of those great displays which from time to time are offered up as sacrifices to the opinion of the world. Few of her own peculiar set were present. Some, she omitted herself; others, had begged off of their own accord. Midchikoff, however, was there; for, however accustomed to the tone and habits of a life of mere dissipation, he possessed every requirement for mixing with general society. It was true he was not fond of meeting "Royal Highnesses," before whom his own equivocal rank sank into insignificance; nor did he love "Cardinals," whose haughty pretensions always overtopped every other nobility. To oblige Lady Hester, however, he did come, and condescended, for "the nonce," to assume his most amiable of moods. The Marchesa Guardoni, an old coquette of the days of the French Empire, but now a rigid devotee, and a most exclusive moralist; a few elderly diplomates, of a quiet and cat-like smoothness of manner; with certain notabilities of the Court, made up the party. There were no English whatever; Jekyl, who made out the list, well knowing that Florence offered none of a rank sufficiently distinguished, except Norwood, whose temporary absence from the city was rather a boon than the reverse; for the noble Viscount, when not "slang,"

was usually silent, and, by long intercourse with the turf and its followers, had ceased to feel any interest in topics which could not end in a wager.

The entertainment was very splendid. Nothing was wanting which luxury or taste could contribute. The wines were delicious; the cookery perfect. The guests were courteous and pleasing; but all was of the quietest. None of the witty sallies, the piquant anecdotes, the brilliant repartees, which usually pattered like hail around that board. Still less were heard those little histories of private life where delinquencies furnish all the interest. The royal guest imposed a reserve which the presence of the Cardinal deepened. The conversation, like the *cuisine*, was flavoured for fine palates: both were light, suggestive, and of easy digestion. Events were discussed rather than the actors in them. All was ease and simplicity; but it was a stately kind of simplicity, which served to chill those that were unaccustomed to it. So Kate Dalton felt it; and, however sad the confession, we must own that she greatly preferred the free and easy tone of Lady Hester's midnight receptions to the colder solemnity of these distinguished guests.

Even to the Cardinal's whist-table, everything wore a look of state and solemnity. The players laid down their cards with a measured gravity, and scored their honours with the air of men discharging a high and important function. As for the Archduke, he sat upon a sofa beside Lady Hester, suffering himself to be amused by the resources of her small talk, bowing blandly at times, occasionally condescending to a smile, but rarely uttering even a monosyllable. Even that little social warmth that was kindled by the dinner-

table seemed to have been chilled by the drawing-room, where the conversation was maintained in a low, soft tone, that never rose above a murmur. It may be, perhaps, some sort of consolation to little folk to think that Princes are generally sad looking. The impassable barrier of reserve around them, if it protect from all the rubs and frictions of life, equally excludes from much of its genial enjoyment; and all those little pleasantries which grow out of intimacy are denied those who have no equals.

It was in some such meditation as this Kate Dalton sat, roused occasionally to bestow a smile or a passing word of acknowledgment in return for some of those little morsels of compliment and flattery which old courtiers pay as their rightful tribute to a young and handsome woman. She was sufficiently accustomed to this kind of homage to accept it without losing, even for an instant, any train of thought her mind was pursuing. Nor did the entrance of any new guest, a number of whom had been invited for the evening, distract her from her half reverie.

The *salons*, without being crowded, now showed a numerous company, all of whom exhibited in their demeanour that respectful reserve the presence of Royalty ever inspires. It seemed, indeed, as though all the conversation that went forward was like a mere "aside" to that more important dialogue which was maintained beside the Prince.

A slow but measured tide of persons passed before him, bowing with respectful deference as they went. With some he deigned to speak a few words, others had a smile, or a little nod of recognition, and some again one of those cold and vacant stares with which

great people are occasionally wont to regard little ones. His Royal Highness was not one of those accomplished princes whose pride it is to know the name, the family, the pursuits, and predilections of each new *présentée;* on the contrary, he was absent, and forgetful to a degree scarcely credible; his want of memory betraying him into innumerable mistakes, from which, even had he known, no adroitness of his own could have extricated him. On this evening he had not been peculiarly fortunate; he had complimented a minister who had just received his recal in disgrace — he had felicitated a young lady on her approaching marriage, which had been broken off; while the burden of his talk to Lady Hester was in disparagement of those foreigners who brought a scandal upon his court by habits and manners which would not be tolerated in their own countries. Divorce, or even separation, met his heavy reprobation; and while his code of morality, on the whole, exhibited very merciful dispositions, he bestowed unmitigated severity upon all that could shock the world's opinion.

To this Lady Hester had to listen as best she might — a task not the less trying and difficult from the ill-suppressed looks of malice and enjoyment she saw on every side. From all these causes put together, the occasion, however flattering to her vanity, was far from being pleasurable to her feelings, and she longed for it to be over. The Prince looked wearied enough, but somehow there is nothing like royalty for endurance; their whole lives would seem to teach the lesson, and so he sat on, saying a stray word, bowing with half-closed lids, and looking as though very little more would set him fast asleep.

It was the very culminating point of the whole evening's austerity; one of those little pauses which now and then occur had succeeded to the murmur of conversation. The whist party had been broken up, and the Cardinal was slowly advancing up the room, the company, even to the ladies, rising respectfully as he passed, when the folding-doors were thrown wide, and a servant announced Mr. Scroope Purvis.

If the name was unknown to the assembled guests, there was one there at least who heard it with a sensation of actual terror, and poor Kate Dalton sank back into her chair with a kind of instinctive effort at concealment. By this time the door had closed behind him, leaving Mr. Purvis standing with an expression of no small bewilderment at the gorgeous assembly into which he had intruded.

Lady Hester's quick ear had caught the name, even from the furthest end of the room, but while she attributed it to the mispronunciations of which foreign servants are so liberal, looked out with some curiosity for him who owned it.

Nor had she to look long, for, his first moment of surprise over, Purvis put up his double eye-glass and commenced a tour of the rooms, in that peculiarly scrutinising way for which he was distinguished. The fact that all the faces were unknown to him seemed to impart additional courage to his investigations, for he stared about with as little concern as he might have done in a theatre.

Most men in his situation would have been egoist enough to have thought only of themselves, and the awkwardness of their own position. Purvis, on the contrary, had an eye for everything; for the chande-

liers on the walls to the crosses on the dress-coats — from the decorations of the *salons* to the diamonds — he missed nothing; and with such impartial fairness did he bestow his glances, that the Cardinal's cheeks grew red as his own stockings, as Scroope surveyed him. At last he reached the end of the great drawing-room, and found himself standing directly in front of the canopied seat, where the Archduke sat with Lady Hester. Not heeding, if he even remarked, the little circle which etiquette had drawn in front of the Prince, Purvis advanced within the charmed precincts, and stared steadily at the Duke.

"I perceive that one of your friends is most anxious to pay his respects to you, Lady Hester," said the Prince, with a very peculiar smile.

"I beg to assure you, Sir, that the gentleman is unknown to me; his presence here is an honour for which I am totally unprepared."

"My name is Purvis, Madam — Sc — Sc — Scroope Purvis. Miss Dalton knows me; and my sister, is Mrs. Ricketts."

"You will find Miss Dalton yonder, Sir," said Lady Hester, all whose efforts were barely sufficient to restrain her temper.

"I see her," cried Purvis, putting his glass up; "but she's trying to escape me. She's got a man with a re — re — red beard before her, but it won't do — I'm too sh — sh — sharp for that."

The Archduke laughed, and heartily too, at this sally; and Purvis, emboldened by the complaisance, edged more closely towards him to point out the lady in question. "She has a droll kind of sc — sc — scarf

in her hair; there, don't you see her now! Have you ever seen the pictures in the Pitti Palace?"

The question was a little startling, as the personage to whom it was addressed had his residence there. The Archduke, however, merely bowed in acquiescence, and Purvis went on: "My sister Zoe copied one — and I like it better than the Ti — Tit — Titian itself. We smoked it, too, and made it look so brown, you'd never guess it to be mo — mo — mo — modern."

To judge from the bewildered look of the Duke, the whole of this speech was pure Chaldee to him; and when he turned to Lady Hester for an explanation, he discovered that she had left her seat. Whether mistaking the motion as an invitation to be seated, or merely acting by his own impulses, Scroope crossed over and sat down on the sofa with a degree of self-satisfaction that lighted up all his features.

"You're not one of the fa — family, are you?" asked he.

"I have not that honour," said the Prince, with a bow.

"I thought not. I suspected that there was a tw — tw — twang in your English that looked foreign, but I know your face quite well."

The Duke bowed again.

"Pretty rooms these," said Purvis, with his glass to his eye; "what a d — d — deal of money they must have cost. They're going it fast, these Onslows."

"Indeed," said the Prince, who only half understood the remark.

"I know it," said Scroope, with a confidential wink. "Their butcher se — se — serves us, and he

won't give anything till they have sent their orders; and as for wine, they drink Bordeaux in the servants' hall. I don't know what *you* have, but a d — d — deuced sight better than ever *I* get."

"Good wine, however, can be had here, I hope," said the Duke, blandly.

"Yes, if you sm — sm — smuggle it," said Scroope, with a knowing cackle; while, to add poignancy to the remark, he nudged the Prince with his elbow. "That's the only way to have it. The st — stupid government sees nothing."

"Is that the case, Sir?" asked the Prince, with a degree of interest he had not manifested before.

"To be sure it is. My sister Zoe never pays duty on anything, and if you like your c — c — cigars cheap, just t — t — tell me, that's all. The G — G — Grand Duke never got a sixpence of my money yet, and if I kn — know myself, he never shall."

"Do you bear him any grudge, Sir, that you say this so emphatically?"

"No — not at all. They tell me that he's good-hearted, although somewhat we — weak in the a — a — attic story;" and here Scroope tapped his forehead significantly — "but that's in the family. My sister Zoe could tell you such st — stories about them, you'd die laughing; and then there's Jekyl takes them off so well! It's c — c — capital fun. He gives a dia — dia — dialogue between the Grand Duke and the Pope's Nuncio, that's better than a farce."

How far Mr. Purvis might have been carried in his zeal to be agreeable there is no saying, when Lady Hester came up with Kate leaning on her arm.

"This gentleman claims acquaintance with you, Miss Dalton," said she, haughtily.

"Oh, to be sure — she knows me; and I have a letter for her, from her — her fa — father," said Purvis, drawing forth a packet like a postman's.

"Miss Dalton would prefer being seated, Sir," said Lady Hester, while she motioned towards another part of the room.

"Yes, yes, of course, we 'll find out a snug co — corner somewhere for a chat; just take my arm, will you? Let us get away from all these great 'Dons,' with their stars and crosses." And, without waiting for Kate's reply, he drew her arm within his own, and set out in that little shuffling trot which he always assumed when he fancied he had business on hand.

The ridicule of being associated with such a companion would at any other moment have overwhelmed Kate Dalton with shame, but now, whether from the few words which Lady Hester had whispered in her ear, whether the fact of his unauthorised appearance, or whether it were the dread of some greater disgrace to follow, she actually felt a sense of relief in the continuous flow of twaddle which he kept up as they passed down the room.

"Who was that smiled as we passed?" asked he.

"Prince Midchikoff."

"Oh, that was he, was it? You must introduce me."

"Not now; pray, not now; at any other time," cried she, in perfect terror.

"Well, but don 't forget it. Zoe would never forgive me, if I told her that I lost the op — op — opportunity; she wants to know him so very much."

"Of course, at another time," said Kate, hurrying him along with increasing speed.

"Who's he?" asked Purvis, as a tall and stately personage bowed blandly to Kate.

"The Austrian Minister."

"Not the fellow that st — st — strangled the Emperor? Oh, I forgot; he was a Russian, wasn't he? They got him down, and ch — ch — choked him; ha! ha! ha! There's a man with a red moustache, so like the fellow who sells bou — bou — 'bouquets' at the Cascini."

"A Hungarian Magnate," whispered Kate.

"Is he, though? Then let's have an — another look at him. He has as many gold chains about him as a shop on the Ponte Vecchio. Zoe would like him, he's so odd!"

At last, but not without great efforts, Kate succeeded in reaching a small chamber, where two others already were seated, and whose figures were undistinguishable in the obscurity of a studiously-shaded lamp.

"Isn't it strange, she never asked for Zoe?" said Purvis, as he took his seat on a sofa; "not to inquire for a person sick under her own r — r — roof?"

"Lady Hester is not acquainted with Mrs. Ricketts."

"Well, but sh — sh — she ought to be. Zoe made a party for her — a d — d — dinner-party; and had Hagg — Haggerstone and Foglass, and the rest of them. And after all, you know, they are only B — Bankers, these Onslows, and needn't give themselves airs."

"You have a letter for me, Mr. Purvis? will you pardon my impatience —"

"Yes, to be sure. I've a letter, and an enclosure in it, too; at least, it feels crisp like a note — a bank-note; that's the reason you're impatient; perhaps the re — re — remittance was long a-coming, eh?"

Kate made no reply to this speech, but her cheek grew scarlet as she heard it.

Purvis, meanwhile, spread his packet of papers before him, and began his search for Dalton's letter.

"No, that ain't it; that's from Foglass, all about Norwood, and his N — N — Newmarket affair. That's a letter from Lord Gullston's valet, with such a droll ac — account of the whole family. Zoe recom — mended him; and the poor fellow's very grateful, for he writes about all that goes on in the house. Lady G., it seems, has the temper of a f — f — fiend. Well, don't be im — impatient; I'll find your father's letter in a minute. He writes such a cr — cr — cramp old hand, one should detect it at once. I ta — take it that he's a bit of a character, the old gen — gentleman. I'm sure he is; but what have I done with his letter. Oh! here it is! here it is! and 'with haste' written on the corner, too."

Kate caught the letter impatiently, and, without any thought for Purvis or the place, tore it open at once. In doing so, the enclosure fell to the ground without her perceiving it; and, stranger still, it escaped the attention of Purvis; but that worthy man, not exactly venturing to read over her shoulder, had established himself directly in front, where, with his double eye-glass, he scanned every change in her features during the perusal.

"All well at home, I hope, eh? How she changes colour," muttered he to himself. "Nobody ill; nobody

dead, eh?" asked he, louder. "It must be something serious, though; she 's trembling like ague. Let me give you a chair; that is, if I can f — find one in this little den; they 've got nothing but d — divans all round it." And he hurried forth into the larger *salon* in search of a seat.

It was not without considerable trouble to himself and inconvenience to various others that he at last succeeded, and returned to the boudoir with a massive arm-chair in his hands; but what was his dismay to find that Miss Dalton had made her escape in the meanwhile. In vain did he seek her through the *salons*, which now were rapidly thinning; the distinguished guests having already departed.

A stray group lingered here and there, conversing in a low tone; and around the fires were gathered little knots of ladies muffled and cloaked, and only waiting for the carriages. It was like a stage, when the performance was over! Scarcely deigning to notice the little man, who, with palpable keenness of scrutiny, pursued his search in every quarter, they gradually moved off, leaving Purvis alone to tread the "banquet-hall deserted." The servants, as they extinguished the lights, passed and repassed him without remark; so that, defeated and disappointed, he was obliged at last to retire, sorrowfully confessing to his own heart how little success had attended his bold enterprise.

As he passed along the galleries and descended the stairs, he made various little efforts to open a conversation with some one or other of the servants; but these dignified officials responded to his questions in the driest and shortest manner; and it was only as he

reached the great gate of the palace that he chanced upon one courteous enough to hear him to the end in his oft-repeated question of "Who was th — th — that with the large st — st — star on his breast, and a wh — wh — white beard?"

The porter stared at the speaker, and said, respectfully,

"The Signor probably means the Archduke?"

"Not the Archduke Fr — Fr — Fr — "

"Yes, Sir," said the man; and closed the heavy door after him, leaving Purvis in a state of astonishment, and as much shame as his nature permitted him to feel. Neither upon himself, nor his sensations, have we any intention to dwell; and leaving him to pursue his way homeward, we beg to return once more within those walls from which he had just taken his departure.

If Lady Hester's grand company had gone, the business of the evening was by no means over; on the contrary, it was the hour of her night receptions, and now the accustomed guests of those favoured precincts came dropping in from theatres, and operas, and late dinners. These men of pleasure looked jaded and tired, as usual; and, except the little tinkling sounds of Jekyl's small treble, no other voice sounded as they walked along the corridors.

When they entered Lady Hester's boudoir, they found that lady recounting to Midchikoff the whole circumstances of the morning's adventure — a recital which she continued without other interruption than a smile or a nod, or a little gesture of the hand to each of the new arrivals as he came in. If the lady's manner was devoid of all ceremony, that of the gen-

tlemen was less ceremonious still, for they stretched themselves on divans, rested their legs upon chairs, and stood back to the fire, with a degree of careless ease that bespoke them thoroughly at home. Jekyl, perhaps, the only one present who mingled with this freedom a certain courteous respect that no familiarity made him ever forget.

"And they are still here?" asked the Prince. "Actually in the house at this moment?"

"At this very moment!" responded she, emphatically.

"The whole thing passes belief," exclaimed he.

And now the listless loungers drew their chairs closer to hear the story, and laugh, as men do, who are seldom moved to mirth save when ridicule or malice are the provocatives.

"But you hav'n't heard the worst yet," said Midchikoff. "Pray tell them of your visitor of this evening."

And Lady Hester narrated the appearance of Mr. Purvis, who, having secured his entrance by a visit to his sister, had so unceremoniously presented himself in the drawing-room.

"Heaven knows what he said to his Royal Highness when I was away. To judge from his face, it must have been something atrocious; and the last thing he said on leaving was, 'I must try and not forget your agreeable friend's name.'"

"You might as well have invited *me*, as have had your 'friend' Purvis, after all," said a young Italian Noble, whose political opinions found no favour at Court.

"But what do you mean to do, my Lady?" asked Midchikoff. "Is the enemy to hold undisputed possession of the fortress?"

"It is precisely on that point I want advice, Prince."

"What if we form ourselves into a council of state?" said an Austrian General.

"By all means," said the others, who now formed a semicircle in front of Lady Hester's sofa.

"The youngest officer always speaks first," said the Austrian.

"Then that duty is mine," said a little man of about eighty-two or three, and who had represented France at half the Courts of Europe. "I should advise a protocol in the form of protest. It is a palpable invasion of territory, but, followed by an ample apology and a speedy evacuation, may be forgiven. There are historical warrants for such transgressions being accepted as acts almost of compulsion."

"The case of Anspach, for instance," said the Austrian, with a malicious smile.

"Precisely, General — precisely a case in point," rejoined the old Diplomate, with a bow and a smile that almost seemed grateful. "The shortest road to victory is ever the best."

"Let's try a fever, or a fire; by Jove! the sacrifice of a few chairs and window-curtains would be a cheap alternative," said George Onslow.

"Why not essay a compromise, my Lady," interposed a young German Secretary of Legation; "a mixed garrison, like that of Rastadt."

"Lady Hester's troops to mount guard alternately with the Ricketts'! Downright treason — base treason!" exclaimed another.

"What would you think of a special mission, my Lady," simpered Jekyl. "It would at least serve to enlighten us as to the views of the enemy. The dis-

cussion of the past often throws much light on the future."

"Jekyl wants to earn a decoration," said another, laughing; "he intends to be the envoy himself."

"I'll wager that I know Midchikoff's policy," said a young Sicilian, who always spoke with a frank fearlessness that is most rare with other Italians.

"Well, let us hear it," said the Prince, gravely.

"You would counsel the national expedient of retiring before the enemy, and making the country too cold to hold them?"

"How absurd," said Lady Hester, half angrily; "give up one's house to a set of people who have had the impertinence to intrude themselves unasked?"

"And yet Giasconi is right," said the Prince. "It is the best suggestion we have heard yet. Hostilities imply, to a certain extent, equality; negotiation is an acknowledgment of acquaintanceship; a dignified retreat, however, avoids either difficulty."

"In that case, let's starve them out," said George. "Suffer no supplies to be thrown into the place, and exact the most humble terms of submission."

"Then, where to go to? that's another question," said Lady Hester.

"His Eminence expects to see you in Rome," whispered the Abbé, who had waited for an opportunity for the suggestion. "I believe he relies on a promise."

"Very true; but not just yet. Besides, the season is almost over," said Lady Hester, with a slight degree of confusion.

"Don't be frightened, Abbé," whispered Jekyl in

D'Esmonde's ear. "Her Ladyship is assuredly 'going to Rome' later on."

The Priest smiled, with an expression that told how fully he comprehended the phrase.

"There's a little Villa of mine, on the Lake of Como, very much at your service," said Midchikoff, with the easy indifference of one suggesting something perfectly indifferent to him.

"Do you mean La Rocca, Prince?" asked the Sicilian.

"Yes. They tell me it is prettily situated, but I've never seen it. The Empress passed a few weeks there last year, and liked it," said Midchikoff, languidly.

"Really, Prince, if I don't know how to accept, I am still more at a loss for power to refuse your offer."

"When will you go?" said he, dryly, and taking out his memorandum-book to write.

"What says Mr. Jekyl?" said Lady Hester, turning to that bland personage, who, without apparently attending to what went forward, had heard every syllable of it.

"This is Tuesday," said Jekyl. "There's not much to be done; the Villa wants for nothing: I know it perfectly."

"Ah! it's comfortable, then?" said the Prince, with a slight degree of animation.

"La Rocca is all that Contarete's taste could make it," replied Jekyl.

"Poor Contarete! he was an excellent maître d'hôtel," said Midchikoff. "He's still with me, somewhere; I rather believe in Tartary, just now."

"Your Ladyship may leave this on Thursday," said Jekyl; who well knew that he was paying the most

flattering compliment to Midchikoff in naming the shortest possible time for preparation.

"Will this be inconvenient, Prince?" asked Lady Hester.

"No; not in the least. If Jekyl will precede you by a couple of hours, I trust all will be ready."

"With your permission, then, we will say Thursday," said she, who, with her habitual delight in novelty, was already wild with pleasure at the whole scheme.

"Perhaps I'll come and visit you," said Midchikoff. "I shall have to go to Vienna soon."

Lady Hester bowed and smiled her acknowledgments for this not over gracious speech.

"May we follow you, too, Lady Hester?" asked the Sicilian.

"We expect that much from your loyalty, gentlemen. Our exile will test your fidelity."

"There's something or other inconvenient about the stables," said Midchikoff, "but I forget what it is; they are up a mountain, or down in a valley. I don't remember it, but the Emperor said it was wrong, and should be changed."

"They are on the opposite side of the Lake, Prince," interposed Jekyl, "and you must cross over to your carriage by boat."

"Oh, delightful — quite delightful!" exclaimed Lady Hester, with childish joy, at the novelty.

"La Rocca is on a little promontory," said Jekyl, "only approachable from the water, for the mountain is quite inaccessible."

"You shall have a road made, if you wish it," said the Prince, languidly.

"On no account. I wouldn't for the world destroy the isolation of the spot."

"Do you happen to remember, Mr. Jekyl, if there be any pictures there?"

"There are some perfect gems, by Greuze."

"Oh! that's where they are, is it? I could never call to mind where they were left."

The conversation now became general, in discussing Lady Hester's change of abode, the life they should all lead when on the Lake, and the innumerable stories that would be circulated to account for her sudden departure. This same mystery was not the least agreeable feature of the whole, and Lady Hester never wearied in talking of all the speculations her new step was certain to originate; and although some of the company regretted the approaching closure of a house which formed the resource of every evening, others were not sorry at the prospect of anything which offered a change to the monotony of their lives.

"You 'll come to breakfast to-morrow, Mr. Jekyl," said Lady Hester, as he followed the departing guests. "I shall want you the whole day."

He bowed with his hand to his heart, and never did features of like mould evince a deeper aspect of devotion.

CHAPTER XI.

Jekyl's Counsels.

One of the most striking characteristics of our present age is the singular mixture of frivolity and seriousness — the almost absurd contrast between grave inquiry and reckless dissipation, which pervades the well-to-do classes. Never was there a period when merely sensual gratification was more highly prized and paid for; and never, perhaps, a time when every rank in life was more eager in the pursuit of knowledge. To produce this state of things a certain compromise was necessary, and while the mere man of pleasure affected a taste for literature and politics, the really active-minded either sought his relaxation, or extended his influence, by mingling in scenes of frivolity and amusement.

The age which made Dandies Philosophers, made Lord Chancellors droll, and Bishops eccentric. A paradoxical spirit was abroad, and it seemed to be a matter of pride with every one, to do something out of his station. The whole temper of society, and the tone of conversation, exhibited this new taste.

Lady Hester Onslow was not a bad specimen of the prevailing mania. There was by nature a certain fidgety, capricious volatility about her, that defied anything like a regular pursuit, or a continued purpose. With a reasonably quick apprehension and no judgment, in being everything, she became nothing.

Always mistaking sympathies for convictions, it was quite sufficient to interest her imagination, to secure her adhesion, not, indeed, that it was worth much when obtained, seeing that she was but a feeble ally at the best. Her employment of the day was a type of herself. The mornings were passed in mesmeric experiences with her doctor, or, what she fancied were, theological discussions with the Abbé d'Esmonde. It would be difficult to say in which the imaginative exaltation more predominated. All the authentic and incredible phenomena of the one, all the miraculous pretensions of the other, were too little for a credulity that stopped at nothing. Of second sight, remote sympathy, and saintly miracles, she never could hear enough! "Give me facts," she would say; by which she meant narratives. "I will have no theories, Doctor." "Don't bear me down with arguments, Mons. l'Abbé." "Facts, and facts alone have any influence with *me*."

Now, such facts as she asked for were easily obtainable, and the greatest miser need not have grudged her an ample meal of them. Many of the facts, too, possessed the pleasing feature of being personal in their interest. One day, it was a charming young patient of the Doctor, who, having touched a tress of Lady Hester's hair, made the most astonishing revelations of her Ladyship's disposition; telling facts of her feelings, her nature, and even her affections, that "she knew were only confided to her own heart." Various little incidents of her daily life were foretold, even to such minute matters as the purchase of articles of jewellery, which she had not even seen at the time, and only met her eyes by accident afterwards.

The Abbé, with equal success, assured her of the intense interest taken in her by the Church. Beautifully-bound and richly-illustrated books were offered to her, with the flattering addition, that prayers were then being uttered at many a shrine for her enlightenment in their perusal. Less asked to conform herself to a new belief, than to reconcile the faith to her own notions, she was given the very widest latitude to her opinions. If she grew impatient at argument, a subtle illustration, an apt metaphor, or sometimes a happy "*mot*," settled the question. The Abbé was a clever talker, and varied his subjects with all the skill of a master. He knew how to invoke to his aid all that poetry, art, and romance could contribute. The theme was a grand one when the imagination was to be interested, and really deserved a better listener, for, save when the miraculous interposion of saints, or the gaudy ceremonials of the Church were spoken of, she heard the subject with indifference, if not apathy. The consideration of self could, however, always bring her back; and it was ever a successful flattery to assure her how fervently such a Cardinal prayed for her "right-mindedness," and how eagerly even his Holiness looked forward to the moment of counting her among his children.

Her very tastes — those same tastes that ascetic Protestantism was always cavilling at — were beautifully Roman. The Church liked display. Witness her magnificence and splendour, her glorious cathedrals, the pomp and grandeur of her ceremonial! As to music, the choir of the "Duomo" was seraphic, and needed not the association of the dim, vaulted aisles, the distant altar, and the chequered rays of

stained-glass windows, to wrap the soul in a fervour of enthusiasm. Even Beauty was cherished by the Church, and the fair Madonnas were types of an admiring love that was beautifully catholic in its worship.

With all this, the work of conversion was a Penelope's web, that must each day be begun anew, for, as the hour of the Cascini drew nigh, Lady Hester's carriage drew up, and mesmerism, miracles, and all gave way to the fresher interests of courtly loungers, chit-chat, and "bouquets of camelias."

For the next hour or so, her mind was occupied with the gossiping stories of Florentine life, its surface details all recounted by the simpering dandies who gathered around her carriage; its deeper — not unfrequently darker histories — being the province of Mr. Albert Jekyl. Then home to luncheon, for, as Haggerstone related, she dined always after the Opera, and it was then, somewhere verging on midnight, that she really began to live. Then, in all the blaze of dress and jewels, with beauty little impaired by years, and a manner the perfection of that peculiar school to which she attached herself, she was indeed a most attractive person.

Kate Dalton's life was, of course, precisely the same. Except the few hours given to controversial topics, and which she passed in reading, and the occasional change from driving to riding in the Cascini, Kate's day was exactly that of her friend. Not, however, with the same results; for while one was wearied with the tame routine of unvarying pleasure, tired of the monotonous circle of amusement, the other became each day more and more enamoured of a life so unchanging in its happiness. What was uniformity to

Lady Hester, imparted a sense of security to Kate. It was not alone the splendour that surrounded her, the thousand objects of taste and elegance that seemed to multiply around them that captivated her so much; it was the absence of all care, the freedom from every thought that this state was a mere passing one. This Kate felt to be the very highest of enjoyments, and when at night she whispered to herself, "To-morrow will be like to-day," she had said everything that could brighten anticipation.

Her father's letter was the first shock to this delightful illusion! Her own false position of splendour, in contrast to his poverty, now came up palpably before her, and in place of those blissful reveries in which she often passed hours, there rose to her mind the bitter self-accusings of a penitent spirit. She never slept during the night; the greater part of it she spent in tears. Her absence from home, brief as it was, was quite enough to make her forget much of its daily life. She could, it is true, recal the penury and the privation, but not the feelings that grew out of them. How changed must he have become to stoop to this! was the exclamation that she uttered again and again. Where was all that Dalton pride they used to boast of? What became of that family dignity which once was their bulwark against every blow of fortune?

To these thoughts succeeded the sadder one, of, what course remained for her to adopt? A difficulty the greater, since she but half understood what was required of her. He spoke of a bill, and yet the letter contained none: before she broke the seal, it felt as though there was an enclosure, yet she found none; and if there were, of what use would it be? It was

perfectly impossible that she could approach Sir Stafford with such a request; every sense of shame, delicacy, and self-respect revolted at the very thought. Still less could she apply to Lady Hester, whose extravagant and wasteful habits always placed her in want of money, and yet to refuse her father on grounds which he would deem purely selfish, was equally out of the question. She well knew that in a moment of anger and impatience — stung by what he would call the ingratitude of his children — he would probably himself write to Sir Stafford, narrating every circumstance that drove him to the step. Oh, that she had never left him — never ceased to live the life of want and hardship to which time had accustomed her; all the poverty she had ever known brought no such humiliation as this! Poor Nelly's lot now was a hundredfold superior to hers. She saw, too, that reserve once broken on such a theme, her father would not scruple to renew the application as often as he needed money. It was clear enough that he saw no embarrassment, nor any difficulty for her in the matter; that it neither could offend her feelings, nor compromise her position. Could she descend to an evasive or equivocal reply, his temper would as certainly boil over, and an insulting letter would at once be addressed to Sir Stafford. Were she to make the request and fail, he would order her home, and under what circumstances should she leave the house of her benefactors! And yet all this was better than success.

In such harassing reflections warring and jarring in her mind, the long hours of the night were passed. She wept, too; the bitterest tears are those that are wrung from shame and sorrow mingled. Many a ge-

nerous resolve, many a thought of self-devotion and sacrifice rose to her mind; at moments, she would have submitted herself to any wound to self-esteem to have obtained her father's kind word; and at others, all the indignity of a false position overwhelmed her; and she cried as if her very heart were bursting.

Wearied and fevered, she arose and went into the garden. It was one of the brilliant mornings which — for a week or ten days, in Italy — represent the whole season of spring. Although still early, the sun was hot, and the flowers and shrubs, refreshed by the heavy dew, were bursting out into renewed luxuriance in the warm glow. The fountains sparkled, and the birds were singing, and all seemed animated by that joyous spirit which seems the very breath of early morning. All save poor Kate, who, with bent-down head and slow step, loitered along the walks, lost in her gloomiest thoughts.

To return home again was the only issue she could see to her difficulties, to share the humble fortunes of her father and sister, away from a world in which she had no pretension to live! And this, too, just when that same world had cast its fascinations round her — just when its blandishments had gained possession of her heart, and made her feel that all without its pale was ignoble and unworthy. No other course seemed, however, to offer itself, and she had just determined on its adoption, when the short, quick step of some one following her, made her turn her head. As she did so, her name was pronounced, and Mr. Albert Jekyl, with his hat courteously removed, advanced towards her.

"I see with what care Miss Dalton protects the

roses of her cheeks," said he, smiling; "and yet how few there are that know this simple secret."

"You give me a credit I have no claim to, Mr. Jekyl. I have almost forgotten the sight of a rising sun, but this morning I did not feel quite well — a headache — a sleepless night —"

"Perhaps caused by anxiety," interposed he, quietly. "I wish I had discovered your loss in time, but I only detected that it must be yours, when I reached home."

"I don't comprehend you," said she, with some hesitation.

"Is not this yours, Miss Dalton?" said he, producing the bill, which had fallen unseen from her father's letter. "I found it on the floor of the small boudoir, and not paying much attention to it at the time, did not perceive the signature, which would at once have betrayed the ownership."

"It must have dropped from a letter I was reading," said Kate, whose cheek was now scarlet, for she knew Jekyl well enough to be certain that her whole secret was by that time in his hands. Slighter materials than this would have sufficed for his intelligence to construct a theory upon. Nothing in his manner, however, evinced this knowledge, for he handed her the paper with an air of most impassive quietude; while, as if to turn her thoughts from any unpleasantness of the incident, he said.

"You hav'n't yet heard, I suppose, of Lady Hester's sudden resolve to quit Florence?"

"Leave Florence! and for where?" asked she, hurriedly.

"For Midchikoff's villa at Como. We discussed it

all last night after you left, and in twenty-four hours we are to be on the road."

"What is the reason of this hurried departure?"

"The Ricketts' invasion gives the pretext; but of course you know better than I do what a share the novelty of the scheme lends to its attractions."

"And we are to leave this to-morrow!" said Kate, rather to herself than for her companion.

Jekyl marked well the tone and the expression of the speaker, but said not a word.

Kate stood for a few seconds lost in thought. Her difficulties were thickening around her, and not a gleam of light shone through the gloomy future before her. At last, as it were overpowered by the torturing anxieties of her situation, she covered her face with her hands to hide the tears that would gush forth in spite of her.

"Miss Dalton will forgive me," said Jekyl, speaking in a low and most respectful voice, "if I step for once from the humble path I have tracked for myself in life, and offer my poor services as her adviser."

Nothing could be more deferential than the speech, or the way in which it was uttered, and yet Kate heard it with a sense of pain. She felt that her personal independence was already in peril, and that the meek and bashful Mr. Jekyl had gained a mastery over her. He saw all this — he read each struggle of her mind — and, were retreat practicable, he would have retreated, but, the step once taken, the only course was, "forwards."

"Miss Dalton may reject my counsels, but she will not despise the devotion in which they are proffered. A mere accident" — here he glanced at the paper

which she still held in her fingers — "a mere accident has shown me that you have a difficulty; one for which neither your habits nor knowledge of life can suggest the solution." He paused, and a very slight nod from Kate emboldened him to proceed. "Were it not so, Miss Dalton? — were the case one for which your own exquisite tact could suffice, I never would have ventured on the liberty. I, who have watched you with wondering admiration, directing and guiding your course amid shoals, and reefs, and quicksands, where the most skilful might have found shipwreck, it would have been hardihood indeed for *me* to have offered my pilotage. But here, if I err not greatly, here is a new and unknown sea, and here I may be of service to you."

"Is it so plain, then, what all this means?" said Kate, holding out the bill towards Jekyl.

"Alas! Miss Dalton," said he, with a faint smile, "these are no enigmas to us who mix in all the worries and cares of life."

"Then how do you read the riddle," said she, almost laughing at the easy flippancy of his tone.

"Mr. Dalton being an Irish gentleman of a kind disposition and a facile temper, suffers his tenantry to run most grievously into arrear. They won't pay, and he won't make them; his own creditors having no sympathy with such proceedings, become pressing and importunate. Mr. Dalton grows angry, and they grow irritable; he makes his agent write to *them* — they 'instruct' their attorney to write to him. Mr. D. is puzzled, and were it not that — but may I go on?"

"Of course; proceed," said she, smiling.

"You'll not be offended, though?" said he, "be-

cause, if I have not the privilege of being frank, I shall be worthless to you."

"There is no serious offence without intention."

"Very true; but I do not wish there should be even a trivial transgression."

"I'm not afraid. Go on," said she, nodding her head.

"Where was I, then? Oh! I remember. I said that Mr. Dalton, seeing difficulties thickening and troubles gathering, suddenly bethinks him that he has a daughter, a young lady of such attractions that, in a society where wealth and splendour and rank hold highest place, her beauty has already established a dominion which nothing, save her gentleness, prevents being a despotism."

"Mr. Jekyl mistakes the part of friend when he becomes flatterer."

"There is no flattery in a plain unadorned truth," said he, hastily.

"And were it all as you say," rejoined she, speaking with a heightened colour and a flashing eye, "how could such circumstances be linked with those you spoke of?"

"Easily enough, if I did but dare to tell it," was his reply.

"It is too late for reserve; go on freely," said she, with a faint sigh.

Jekyl resumed:

"Mr. Dalton knows — there are thousands could have told him so — that his daughter may be a Princess to-morrow if she wishes it. She has but to choose her rank and her nationality, and there is not a land in Europe in whose Peerage she may not in-

scribe her name. It is too late for reserve," said he, quickly, "and consequently too late for resentment. You must not be angry with me now; I am but speaking in your presence what all the world says behind your back. Hearing this, and believing it, as all believe it, what is there more natural, than that he should address himself to her, at whose disposal lie all that wealth can compass? The sun bestows many a gleam of warmth and brightness before he reaches the zenith. Do not mistake me. This request was scarcely fair; it was ill-advised. Your freedom should never have been jeopardied for such a mere trifle. Had your father but seen with his own eyes your position here, he would never have done this; but, being done, there is no harm in it."

"But what am I to do?" said Kate, trembling with embarrassment and vexation together.

"Send the money, of course," said he, coolly.

"But how, — from what source?"

"Your own benevolence; none other," said he, as calmly. "There is no question of a favour; no stooping to an obligation necessary. You will simply give your promise to repay it at some future day, not specifying when; and I will find the Banker but too happy to treat with you."

"But what prospect have I of such ability to pay; what resources can I reckon upon?"

"You will be angry if I repeat, myself," said Jekyl, with deep humility.

"I am already angry with myself that I should have listened to your proposal so indulgently; my troubles must, indeed, have affected me deeply when I so far forgot myself."

Jekyl dropped his head forward on his breast, and looked a picture of sorrow; after awhile he said,

"Sir Stafford Onslow would, I well know, but be honoured by your asking him the slight favour; but I could not counsel you to do so. Your feelings would have to pay too severe a sacrifice, and hence I advise making it a mere business matter; depositing some ornament — a necklace you were tired of; a bracelet; anything; in fact — a nothing; and thus there is neither a difficulty nor a disclosure."

"I have scarcely anything," said Kate; "and what I have, have been all presents from Lady Hester."

"Morlache would be quite content with your word," said Jekyl, blandly.

"And if I should be unable to acquit the debt, will these few things I possess be sufficient to do it?"

"I should say double the amount, as a mere guess."

"Can I — dare I take your counsel?" cried she, in an accent of intense anxiety.

"Can you reject it, when refusal will be so bitter?"

Kate gave a slight shudder, as though that pang was greater than all the rest.

"There is fortunately no difficulty in the matter whatever," said Jekyl, speaking rapidly. "You will, of course, have many things to purchase before you leave this. Well; take the carriage and your maid, and drive to the Ponte Vecchio. The last shop on the right-hand side of the bridge is 'Morlache's. It is unpromising enough outside, but there is wealth within to subsidise a kingdom. I will be in waiting to receive you, and in a few minutes the whole will be concluded; and if you have your letter ready, you can enclose the sum, and post it at once."

If there were many things in this arrangement which shocked Kate, and revolted against her sense of delicacy and propriety, there was one counterpoise more than enough to outweigh them all. "She should be enabled to serve her father" — she, who alone of all his children had never contributed, save by affection, to his comfort, should now materially assist him. She knew too well the sufferings and anxieties his straitened fortune cost him — she witnessed but too often the half-desperation in which he would pass days, borne down and almost broken-hearted! and she had witnessed that outbreak of joy he would indulge in when an unexpected help had suddenly lifted him from the depth of his poverty. To be the messenger of such good tidings — to be associated in his mind with this assistance — to win his fervent "God bless you!" she would have put life itself in peril, and when Jekyl placed so palpably before her the promptitude with which the act could be accomplished, all hesitation ceased, and she promised to be punctual at the appointed place by three o'clock that same afternoon.

"It is too early to expect to see Lady Hester," said Jekyl; "and, indeed, my real business here this morning was with yourself, so that now I shall drive out to Midchikoff's and make all the arrangements about the Villa. 'Till three, then, good-by!"

"Good-by," said Kate, for the first time disposed to feel warmly to the little man, and half reproach herself with some of the prejudices she used to entertain regarding him.

Jekyl now took his way to the stables, and ordering a Brougham to be got ready for him, sauntered into the house, and took his coffee while he waited.

CHAPTER XII.

"Racca Morlache."

THERE is something of medieval look and air about the Ponte Vecchio in Florence, which gives it a peculiar interest to the traveller. The quaint little low shops on either side, all glittering with gold and gems — the gorgeous tiaras of diamonds — the richly-enamelled cups and vases aside of the grotesque ornaments of peasant costume — the cumbrous ear-rings of stamped gold — the old-fashioned clasps and buckles of massive make — the chains fashioned after long-forgotten models — the strings of oriental pearls, costly and rare enough for queens to wear — are all thrown about in a rich profusion, curiously in contrast to the humble sheds — for they are little more — that hold them.

The incessant roll of equipages — the crowd and movement of a great city — the lingering peasant, gazing with rapturous eyes at the glittering wares — the dark Israelitish face that peers from within — the ever flowing tide of population of every rank and age and country, giving a bustle and animation to the scene, so beautifully relieved by the view that opens on the centre of the bridge, and where, in a vacant space, the Arno is seen wending peacefully along, and scattering its circling eddies beneath the graceful arches of the "Santa Trinitá;" that little glimpse of hill, and vineyard, and river, the cypress-clad heights of San Miniato, and the distant mountain of Vallombrosa,

more beautiful far than all the gold Pactolus ever rolled, or all the gems that ever glittered on crown or coronet.

There was one stall at the end of the bridge, so humble looking and so scantily provided, that no stranger was seen to linger beside it. A few coral ornaments for peasant wear, some stamped medals for pious use, and some of those little silver tokens hung up by devout hands as votive offerings at a holy shrine, were all that appeared, while, as if to confirm the impression of the scanty traffic that went on, the massive door was barred and bolted like the portal of a prison; an almost erased inscription, unrenewed for nigh half a century, told that this was the shop of "Racca Morlache."

There may have been much of exaggeration in the stories that went of the Jew's enormous wealth; doubtless, many of the accounts were purely fabulous; but one fact is certain, that from that lowly roof went forth sums sufficient to maintain the credit of many a tottering state, or support the cost of warlike struggles to replace a dynasty. To him came the heads of despotic governments — the leaders of rebellious democracy — the Russian and the Circassian — the Carlist and the Christino. To the proud champion of divine right, or the fearless promulgator of equality, to all, he was accessible; solvency and his profit were requirements he could not dispense with; but, for the rest, in what channel of future good and evil his wealth was to flow, whether to maintain a throne, or sap its foundation — to uphold a faith, or to desecrate its altars — to liberate a people, or to bind their

fetters more closely, were cares that sat lightly on his heart.

He might, with his vast means, have supported a style like royalty itself. There was no splendour nor magnificence he need have denied himself; nor, as the world goes, any society from which he should be debarred. Gold is the picklock to the doors of palaces as of prisons; but he preferred this small and miserable habitation, which for above two centuries had never borne any other name than the "Casa Morlache."

Various reasons were given out for a choice so singular; among others, it was said that the Grand Duke was accustomed to visit the Jew by means of a secret passage from the "Pitti," while some alleged that the secret frequenters of Morlache's abode all came by water, and that, in the dark night, many a boat skimmed the Arno, and directed its course to the last arch of the Ponte Vecchio. With these rumours we have no concern, nor with Morlache himself, have we more than a passing business.

When Kate Dalton had driven up to the door, she had all but determined to abandon her intention. The arguments, which in the morning had taken her by surprise, seemed now weak and futile, and she was shocked with herself for even the momentary yielding to Jekyl's counsels. Her only doubt was whether to drive on without further halt, or leave some short message, to the effect that she had called, but could not delay there. This seemed the better and more courteous proceeding; and while she was yet speaking to the dark-eyed, hooked-nose boy, who appeared at the door, Jekyl came up.

"Be quick, Miss Dalton! Don't lose an instant," said he. "Morlache is going to the Palace, and we shall miss him."

"But I have changed my mind. I have resolved not to accept this assistance. It is better — far better that I should not."

"It is too late to think of that now," said he, interrupting, and speaking with some slight degree of irritation.

"How too late? What do you mean?"

"That I have already told Morlache the whole story, and obtained his promise for the loan."

"Oh, Sir! why have you done this?" cried she, in a voice of anguish.

"I had your free permission for it, Miss Dalton. When we parted this morning, the matter was fully agreed on between us; but still, if you desire to retract, your secret is in safe keeping. Morlache never betrays a confidence."

"And he has heard my name!" cried she, in a broken, sobbing tone.

"Not for the first time, be assured. Even Crœsus looked up from his ingots to ask if it were 'la belle Dalton;' and when I said 'Yes,' 'That's enough,' replied he; 'would that all my moneys had so safe investment!' But stay; there is Purvis yonder. He is pretending to examine an eye-glass in that shop opposite, but I see well that he is there only *en vidette*."

"What shall I do?" exclaimed the poor girl, now torn by impulses and emotions the most opposite.

"One thing you must do at once," said Jekyl; "get out of the carriage, and visit two or three of the shops, as if in quest of some article of jewellery. His

anxiety to learn the precise object of your search will soon draw him from his 'lair."

The decision of this counsel, almost like a command, so far imposed upon Kate that she at once descended, and took Jekyl's arm along the bridge. They had not gone many yards, when the short, little, shuffling step of Purvis was heard behind them. Lingering to gaze at some of the splendid objects exposed for sale, they at last reached a very splendid stall, where diamonds, pearls, and rubies lay in heaps of gorgeous profusion. And now Purvis had stationed himself exactly behind them, with his head most artistically adjusted to hear everything that passed between them.

Jekyl seemed to feel his presence as if by an instinct, and without ever turning his eye from the glass-case, said, in a voice of some disparagement,

"All modern settings! — very lustrous — very brilliant; but not at all what we are looking for."

Kate made no reply; for while she had scruples about abetting a mere scheme, she was not the less eager to be free of the presence of the 'Great Inquisitor.'"

"That, perhaps," said Jekyl, pointing to a magnificent cross of brilliants, "would not go ill with the necklace, although the stones are smaller. Say something — anything," added he, in a lower tone; "the spell is working."

"That is very handsome," said Kate, pointing at a venture to an object before her.

"So it is," said Jekyl, quickly. "Let us see what value they place upon it. Oh, here is Mr. Purvis — how fortunate; perhaps in all Florence there is not

one so conversant with all that concerns taste and elegance, and, as an old resident, happily exempt from all the arts and wiles played off upon our countrymen."

"How d'ye do — d'ye do?" cried Purvis, shaking hands with both. "You heard of the bl — bl — blunder I made last night about the Ar — Archduke?"

"Not a word of it," replied Jekyl.

"I told him he was a — a — a — fool," cried Purvis, with a scream and a cackle that very constantly followed any confession of an impertinence.

"Meno male!" exclaimed Jekyl. "Even Princes ought to hear truth sometimes; but you can help us here. Mr. Purvis, do you see that châtelaine yonder, with the large emerald pendant?. Could you ascertain the price of it for Miss Dalton? They'll not attempt to extortionate upon *you*, which they would, assuredly, if she entered the shop."

"To be sure; I'll do it with pl — pleasure. Who is it for?"

"That's a secret, Mr. Purvis; but *you* shall hear it afterwards."

"I guess al — ready," said Scroope, with a cunning leer. "You're going to be m — m — m — married, a'n't you?"

"Mr. Purvis, Mr. Purvis, I must call you to order," said Jekyl, who saw that very little more would make the scene unendurable to Kate.

"I hope it's not an It — It — Italian fellow; for they're all as poor as Laza — Laza — Laza —"

"Yes, yes, of course; we know that: your discretion is invaluable," said Jekyl; "but pray step in, and ask this question for us."

"I'll tell you who'll do better," said Purvis, who, once full of a theme, never paid any attention to what was said by others. "Midchi — Midchi — Midchi — k — k — off! he owns half of —"

"Never mind what he owns; but remember that Miss Dalton is waiting all this time," said Jekyl, who very rarely so far lost command of his temper; and at last Purvis yielded, and entered the shop.

"Come, now," said Jekyl to his companion; "it will take him full five minutes to say 'Châtelaine,' and before that we shall be safely housed." And with these words he hurried her along, laughing, in spite of all her anxieties, at the absurdity of the adventure. "He'll see the carriage when he comes out," added he, "and so I'll tell the coachman to drive slowly on towards the Pitti." And thus, without asking her consent, he assumed the full guidance at once, and, ere she well knew how or why, she found herself within the dark and dusky precincts of Morlache's shop.

Jekyl never gave Kate much time for hesitation, but hurried her along through a narrow passage, from which a winding flight of stone steps led downwards to a considerable distance, and at last opened upon a neat little chamber on the level of the Arno, the window opening on the stream, and only separated from it by a little terrace, covered with geraniums, in full flower. There was a strange undulating motion that seemed communicated from the stream to the apartment, which Jekyl at once explained to his companion as a contrivance for elevating and depressing the chamber with the changes in the current of the river, otherwise the room must have been under water

for a considerable portion of the year. While he descanted on the ingenuity of the mechanism, and pointed attention to the portraits along the walls — the Kings and Kaisers with whom Morlache had held monied relations — the minutes slipped on, and Jekyl's powers as a talker were called upon to speak against time, the fidgety nervousness of his manner, and the frequent glances he bestowed at the timepiece, showing how impatiently he longed for the Jew's arrival. To all Kate's scruples he opposed some plausible pretext, assuring her, that if she desired it, no mention should be made of the loan; that the visit might be as one of mere curiosity, to see some of those wonderful gems which had once graced the crowns of royalty; and that, in any case, the brief delay would disembarrass them on the score of Purvis, whose spirit of inquiry would have called him off in some other direction. At last, when now upwards of half an hour had elapsed, and no sound nor sight bore token of the Jew's coming, Jekyl resolved to go in search of him, and requesting Kate to wait patiently for a few minutes, he left the room.

At first, when she found herself alone, every noise startled and terrified her; the minutes, as she watched the clock, seemed drawn out to hours; she listened with an aching anxiety for Jekyl's return, while, with a sorrowing heart, she reproached herself for ever having come there. To this state of almost feverish excitement succeeded a low and melancholy despression, in which the time passed without her consciousness; the half-dulled sounds of the city, the monotonous plash of the stream as it flowed past, the distant cries of the boatmen as they guided their swift

barques down the strong current, aiding and increasing a feeling that was almost lethargic. Already the sun had sunk below the hills, and the tall palaces were throwing their giant shadows across the river, the presage of approaching night, and still she sat there all alone. Jekyl had never returned, nor had any one descended the stairs since his departure. Twice had she shaken off the dreamy stupor that was over her, and tried to find the door of the chamber, but, concealed in the wainscoting, it defied her efforts; and now, worn out with anxiety, and disappointed, she sat down beside the window, gazing listlessly at the water, and wondering when and how her captivity was to end.

The lamps were now being lighted on the quays, and long columns of light streaked the dark river. Across these a black object was seen to glide, and as it passed, Kate could perceive it was a boat that advanced slowly against the current, and headed up the stream. As she watched, it came nearer and nearer; and now she could hear distinctly the sounds of voices talking in French. What, however, was her surprise when, instead of making for the centre arches of the bridge, the boat was vigorously impelled across the river, and its course directed towards the very place where she sat.

However painful her situation before, now, it became downright agony. It was clear there were persons coming; in another moment she would be discovered, unable to explain by what course of events she had come there, and thus, exposed to every surmise and suspicion that chance or calumny might originate. In that brief, but terrible moment, what self-

accusings, what reproaches of Jekyl crossed her mind; and yet all these were as nothing to the misery which coming events seemed full of. For a second or two she stood irresolute, and then, with something like an instinct of escape, she stepped out upon the little terrace that supported the flowers, and, trembling with fear, took her stand beneath the shadow of one of the great buttresses of the bridge. The frail and half-rotten timbers creaked and bent beneath her weight, and close under her feet rolled along the dark river, with a low and sullen sound like moaning. Meanwhile the boat came nearer, and slowly gliding along, was at last brought up at the window. Two figures passed into the chamber, and the boatmen, as if performing a long-accustomed task, rowed out a few lengths into the stream to wait.

From the window, which still remained open, a stream of light now issued, and Kate's quick hearing could detect the rustling sound of papers on the table.

"There they are," said a voice, the first accents of which she knew to belong to the Abbé d'Esmonde. "There they are, Signor Morlache. We have no concealments nor reserve with you. Examine them for yourself. You will find reports from nearly every part of the kingdom, some more, some less, favourable in their bearings, but all agreeing in the main fact, that the cause is a great one, and the success all but certain."

"I have told you before," said the Jew, speaking in a thick, guttural utterance, "that *my* sympathies never lead me into expense. Every solvent cause is

good, every bankrupt one the reverse, in my estimation."

"Even upon that ground I am ready to meet you. The Committee —"

"Aye, who are the Committee," interrupted the Jew, hastily.

"The Committee contains some of the first Catholic names of Ireland; men of landed fortune and great territorial influence, together with several of the higher Clergy.

"The Bishops?"

"The Bishops almost to a man are with us in heart; but their peculiar position requires the most careful and delicate conduct No turn of fortune must implicate *them*, or our cause is lost for ever."

"If your cause be all you say it is, — if the nationality be so strong, and the energies so powerful, as you describe, — why not try the issue, as the Italians and the Hungarians are about to do?" said Morlache. "I can understand a loan for a defined and real object — the purchase of military stores and equipment, to provide arms and ammunition; and I can understand how the lender, too, could calculate his risk of profit or loss on the issue of the struggle; but here, you want half a million sterling; and for what?"

"To win a kingdom!" cried d'Esmonde, enthusiastically. "To bring back to the fold of the Church the long lost sheep; and make Ireland, as she once was, the centre of holy zeal and piety!"

"I am not a Pope, nor a Cardinal, — not even a Monsignore," said Morlache, with a bitter laugh. "You must try other arguments with *me;* and once

more I say, why not join that party who already are willing to risk their lives in the venture?"

"Have I not told you what and who they are who form this party," said D'Esmonde, passionately. "Read those papers before you. Study the secret reports sent from nearly every parish of the kingdom. In some you will find the sworn depositions of men on their deathbeds — the last words their lips have uttered on earth — all concurring to show that Ireland has no hope save in the Church. The men who now stir up the land to revolt are not devoid of courage or capacity. They are bold, and they are able — but they are infidel! They would call upon their countrymen in the name of past associations — the wrongs of bygone centuries; they would move the heart by appeals, touching enough, Heaven knows, to the galling sores of our serfdom, but they will not light one fire upon the altar — they will not carry the only banner that should float in the van of an Irish army. Their bold denouncings may warn some, their poetry will, perhaps, move others; but their prose and verse, like themselves, will be forgotten in a few years, and save a few grassy mounds in a village churchyard, or a prisoner's 'plaint sent over the sea from a land of banishment, nothing will remain of Ireland's patriots."

"England is too powerful for such assailants," said the Jew.

"Very true; but remember, that the stout three-decker, that never struck to an enemy, has crumbled to ruin beneath the dry rot," said D'Esmonde, with a savage energy of manner. "Such is the case now. All is rot and corruption within her: pauperism at home,

rebellion abroad. The nobles, more intolerant as the commonalty grows more ambitious — resources diminishing as taxation increases — disaffection everywhere, in the towns where they read, in the rural districts where they brood over their poverty — and lastly, but greatest of all, schism in the Church — a mutiny in that disorderly mass that never was yet disciplined to obedience. Are these the evidences of strength, or are they sure signs of coming ruin? Mark me," said he, hurriedly; "I do not mean from all this that such puny revolt as we are now to see can shake powers like that of England. These men will have the same fate as Tone and Emmett, without the sympathy that followed them! They will fail, and fail egregiously; but it is exactly upon this failure that our hopes of success are based. Not a priest will join them. On the contrary, their scheme will be denounced from our altars — our flocks warned to stand aloof from their evil influence. Our Bishops will be in close communication with the heads of the government; all the little coquetries of confidence and frankness will be played off; and our loyalty — that's the phrase — our loyalty stand high in public esteem. The very jeers and insults of our enemies will give fresh lustre to our bright example, and our calm and dignified demeanour form the contrast to that rampant intolerance that assails us."

"But for all this classic dignity," said Morlache, sneeringly, "you need no money — such nobility of soul is, after all, the cheapest of luxuries."

"You are mistaken — mistaken egregiously," broke in D'Esmonde. "It is precisely at that moment that we shall require a strong friend behind us. The

'Press' is all-powerful in England. If it does not actually guide, it is the embodiment of public opinion, without which men would never clothe their sentiments in fitting phrase, or invest them with those short and pithy apothegms that form the watchwords of party. Happily, if it be great it is venal; and although the price be a princely ransom, the bargain is worth the money. Fifty, or a hundred thousand pounds, at that nick, would gain our cause. We shall need many advocates; some, in assumed self-gratulation over their own prescience, in supporting our claims in time past, and reiterating the worn assertion of our attachment to the throne and the constitution; others, to contrast our bearing with the obtrusive loyalty of Orangeism; and others, again, going further than either, to proclaim that but for us, Ireland would have been lost to England; and had not our allegiance stood in the breach, the cause of rebellion would have triumphed."

"And is this character for loyalty worth so much money?" said the Jew, slowly.

"Not as a mere empty name — not as a vain boast," replied D'Esmonde, quickly; "but if the tree be stunted, its fruits are above price. Our martyrdom will not go unrewarded. The moment of peril over, the season of concessions will begin. How I once hated the word! — how I used to despise those who were satisfied with these crumbs from the table of the rich man, not knowing that the time would come when we should set at the board ourselves. Concession! — the vocabulary has no one word I'd change for it — it is conquest, dominion, sovereignty, all together. By concession, we may be all we strive for, but never could wrest by force. Now, my good

Signor Morlache, these slow and sententious English are a most impulsive people, and are often betrayed into the strangest excesses of forgiveness and forgetfulness; insomuch, that I feel assured that nothing will be refused us, if we but play our game prudently."

"And what is the game?" said the Jew, with impatience; "for it seems to me that you are not about to strike for freedom, like the Hungarians or the Lombards. What, then, is the prize you strive for?"

"The Catholicism of Ireland, and then of England — the subjugation of the haughtiest rebel to the Faith — the only one whose disaffection menaces our Holy Church; for the Lutheranism of the German is scarce worth the name of enemy. England, once Catholic, the World is our own!"

The enthusiasm of his manner, and the excited tones of his round, full voice, seemed to check the Jew, whose cold, sarcastic features were turned towards the Priest with an expression of wonderment.

"Let us come back from all this speculation to matter of plain fact," said Morlache, after a long pause. "What securities are offered for the repayment of this sum? — for, although the theme be full of interest to you, to me it has but the character of a commercial enterprise."

"But it ought not," said D'Esmonde, passionately. "The downfal of the tyranny of England is *your* cause as much as *ours*. What Genoa and Venice were in times past, they may become again. The supremacy of the seas once wrested from that haughty power, the long-slumbering energies of Southern Europe will

awaken; the great trading communities of the Levant will resume their ancient place; and the rich argosies of the East once more will float over the waters of the tideless sea."

"Not in our time, Abbé — not in our time," said the Jew, smiling.

"But are we only to build for ourselves?" said D'Esmonde. "Was it thus your own great forefathers raised the glorious Temple?"

The allusion called up but a cold sneer on the Israelite's dark countenance, and D'Esmonde knew better than to repeat a blow that showed itself to be powerless.

A tap at the door here broke in upon the colloquy, and Jekyl's voice was heard on the outside.

"Say you are engaged — that you cannot admit him," whispered D'Esmonde. "I do not wish that he should see me here."

"A thousand pardons, Morlache," said Jekyl, from without; "but when I followed you to the 'Pitti,' I left a young lady here — has she gone away, or is she still here?"

"I never saw her," said Morlache. "She must have left before I returned."

"Thanks — good-by," said Jekyl; and his quick foot was heard ascending the stairs again.

"The night air grows chilly," said the Abbé, as he arose and shut the window; and the boatmen, mistaking the sound for a summons to approach, pulled up to the spot.

With a sudden spring, Kate bounded into the boat, while yet some distance off, and hurriedly said, "To the stairs, beside the Santa Trinitá."

The clink of money, as she took out her purse, made the brief command intelligible, and they shot down the stream with speed.

"Do not speak of me," said she, covering her face with her kerchief as she stepped from the boat; and a gold Napoleon enforced the caution.

It was now night — the lamps were all lighted, and the streets crowded by that bustling throng of population whose hours of business or pleasure commence when day has closed. A thin drizzling rain was falling, and the footway was wet and muddy. Dressed in the height of fashion — all her attire suited to a carriage — Kate set out to walk homeward, with a heart sinking from terror. Many a time in her condition of poverty, with patched and threadbare cloak, had she travelled the dark road from Lichtenthal to Baden after nightfall, fearless and undismayed, no dread of danger nor of insult occurring to her happy spirit, the "Gute Nacht" of some homeward-bound peasant the only sound that saluted her; but now, she was no longer in the secluded valley of the great Fatherland; her way led through the crowded thoroughfares of a great city, with all its crash, and noise, and movement.

If in her wild confusion she had no thought for each incident of the morning, her mind was full of "self-accusings." How explain to Lady Hester her long absence, and her return alone, and on foot? Her very maid, Nina, might arraign her conduct, and regard her with distrust and suspicion. How should she appear in Jekyl's eyes, who already knew her secret; and, lastly, what answer return to her poor father's

letter — that letter which was the cause of all her misfortunes?

"I will tell him everything," said she to herself, as she went along. "I will detail the whole events of this morning, and he shall see that my failure has not come of lukewarmness. I will also strive to show him the nature of my position, and let him know the full extent of the sacrifice he would exact from me. If he persist, what then? Is it better to go back and share the poverty I cannot alleviate? But what alternative have I? Jekyl's flatteries are but fictions. Would I wish them to be otherwise? Alas! I cannot tell; I do not even know my own heart now! Oh, for one true-hearted friend to guide and counsel me!" She thought of George Onslow — rash, impetuous, and ardent; she thought of the Priest, D'Esmonde — but the last scene in which he figured made her shrink with terror from the man of dark intrigues and secret wiles; she even thought of poor Hanserl, who, in all the simplicity of his nature, she wished to have that moment beside her. "But *he* would say, 'Go back — return to the humble home you quitted — put away all the glittering gauds that are clinging to and clasping your very heart. Take, once more, your lowly place at hearth and board, and forget the bright dream of pleasure you have passed through.' But how forget it? Has it not become my hope, my very existence? How easy for those who have not tasted the intoxicating cup, to say, 'Be cool of heart and head!' Nor am I what I was. How then go back to be that which I have ceased to be? Would that I had never left it. Would that I could live again in the dreamland of the poets that we loved so well, and wander with dearest

Nelly through those forest glades, peopled with the creations of Uhland, Tieck, and Chammisso. What a glorious world is theirs, and how unlike the real one!"

Thus lost in thoughts conflicting and jarring with each other — mingling the long past with the distant future — hoping and fearing — now, seeking self-persuasion, here; now, controverting her own opinions, there — she walked hurriedly on, unconscious of the time, the place, and even the rude glances bestowed upon her by many who gazed at her with an insolent admiration. What an armour is innocence! how proof against the venomed dart of malice! Kate never knew the ordeal through which she was passing. She neither saw the looks nor heard the comments of those that passed. If her mind ever turned from the throng of thoughts that oppressed it, it was when some momentary difficulty of the way recalled her to herself, for, as she escaped from the smaller streets, the crowd and crash increased, and she found herself borne along as in a strong current.

"Does this lead to the Piazza Annunziata?" asked she of a woman at a fruit-stall.

"Tell her, Giacomo," said the woman to a youth, who, with a water-melon in his hand, lay at full length on the pavement.

"*Per Baccho!* but she's handsome!" said he, holding up the paper lantern to gaze at her. And Kate hurried on in terror.

CHAPTER XIII.

"A Street Rencontre."

Lady Hester Onslow had passed a day of martyrdom. There was scarcely a single contrariety in the long catalogue of annoyances which had not fallen to her share. Her servants, habitually disciplined to perfection, had admitted every bore of her acquaintance, while, to the few she really wished to see, admittance had been denied. The rumour of an approaching departure had got wind through the servants, and the hall and the court-yard were crowded with creditors, duns, and begging impostors of every age, and class, and country. It seemed as if every one with a petition, or a bill, an unsatisfied complaint, or an unsettled balance, had given themselves a general rendezvous that morning at the Mazzarini Palace.

It is well known how the most obsequious tradespeople grow peremptory when passports are signed, and post-horses are harnessed. The bland courteousness with which they receive "your Ladyship's orders" undergoes a terrible change. Departure is the next thing to death. Another country sounds like another world. The deferential bashfulness that could not hint at the mention of money, now talks boldly of his debt. The solvent creditor, who said always "at your own convenience," has suddenly a most pressing call "to make up a large sum by Saturday."

All the little cajoleries and coquetries, all the little

seductions and temptations of trade, are given up. The invitations to buy are converted into suggestions for "cash payment." It is very provoking, and very disenchanting! From a liberal and generous patron, you suddenly discover yourself transformed into a dubious debtor. All the halo that has surrounded your taste is changed for a chill atmosphere of suspicion and distrust. The tradesfolk, whose respectful voices never rose above a whisper in the hall, now grew clamorous in the ante-chamber; and more than once did they actually obtrude themselves in person within those charmed precincts inhabited by Lady Hester.

What had become of Miss Dalton? — where could she be all this while? Had not Mr. Jekyl called? — what was he about that he had not "arranged" with all these "tiresome creatures?" Was there no one who knew what to do? Was not Captain Onslow, even, to be found? It was quite impossible that these people could be telling the truth; the greater number, if not all of them, must have been paid already, for she had spent a world of money latterly — "somehow." Celestine was charged with a message to this effect, which had a result the very opposite to what it was intended; and now the noisy tongues and angry accents grew bolder and louder. Still none came to her rescue; and she was left alone to listen to the rebellious threatenings that murmured in the court-yard, or to read the ill-spelled impertinences of such as preferred to epistolise their complaints.

The visitors who found their way to the drawing-room had to pass through this motley and clamorous host; and, at each opening of the door, the sounds swelled loudly out.

More than once she bethought her of Sir Stafford; but shame opposed the resolution. His liberality, indeed, was boundless; and therein lay the whole difficulty. Were the matter one for discussion or angry remonstrance, she could have adventured it without a dread. She could easily have brought herself to confront a struggle, but was quite unequal to an act of submission. Among the numerous visitors who now thronged the *salons*, Lord Norwood, who had just returned from a shooting excursion in the Maremma, was the only one with whom she had anything like intimacy.

"I am but a poor counsellor in such a case," said he, laughing. "I was never dunned in my life — personally, I mean — for I always take care not to be found; and as to written applications, I know a creditor's seal and superscription as well as though I had seen him affix them. The very post-mark is peculiar."

"This levity is very unfeeling at such a moment," said Lady Hester, angrily; "and when you see me so utterly deserted, too!"

"But where's Jekyl? He ought to know how to manage this!"

"He has never been here since morning. His conduct is inexcusable!"

"And George?"

"Out the whole day!"

"And the 'Dalton?' for she has rather a good head, if I don't mistake her."

"She took the carriage into town, and has not returned."

"By Jove! I'd write a line to Sir Stafford; I'd

tell him that I was going for change of air, and all that sort of thing, to Como for a week or two, and that these people were so pestering, and pressing, and all that; that, in fact, you were worried to death about it; and finding that your means were so very limited —"

"But he has been most liberal. His generosity has been without bounds."

"So much the better; he 'll come down all the readier now."

"I feel shame at such a course," said she, in a weak, faint voice.

"As I don't precisely know what that sensation is, I can't advise against it; but it must needs be a very powerful emotion, if it prevent you accepting money."

"Can you think of nothing else, Norwood?"

"To be sure I can — there are twenty ways to do the thing. Close the shutters, and send for Buccellini: be ill — dangerously ill — and leave this to-morrow, at daybreak; or give a ball, like Dashwood, and start when the company are at supper. You lose the spoons and forks, to be sure; but that can't be helped. You might try and bully them, too — though perhaps it 's late for *that:* and lastly — and, I believe, best of all — raise a few hundreds, and pay them each something."

"But how or where raise the money?"

"Leave that to *me*, if it must be done. The great benefactor of mankind was the fellow that invented bills. The glorious philanthropist that first devised the bright expedient of living by paper, when bullion failed, was a grand and original genius. How many a poor fellow might have been rescued from the Ser-

pentine, by a few words scrawled over a five-shilling stamp! What a turn to a man's whole earthly career has been often given, as his pen glided over the imaginative phrase, 'I promise to pay!'"

Lady Hester paid no attention to the Viscount's moralizings. Shame — indignant shame, monopolised all her feelings.

"Well," said she, at last, "I believe it must be so. I cannot endure this any longer. Jekyl has behaved shamefully; and George I 'll never forgive. They ought to have taken care of all this. And now, Norwood, to procure the money what is to be done?"

"Here 's the patent treasury for pocket use — the 'Young Man's best Companion,'" said he, taking out of a black morocco-case three or four blank bill-stamps, together with a mass of acceptances of various kinds, the proceeds of various play debts, the majority of which he well knew to be valueless. "What amount will be sufficient — how much shall we draw for?" said he, seating himself, pen in hand, at the table.

"I cannot even guess," said she, trembling with embarrassment and confusion. "There are all these people's accounts and letters. I suppose they are all horrid cheats. I 'm sure I never got half the things, and that the rest are already paid for. But no matter now; let us have done with them at any cost."

"'Morlandi, Coachmaker' — pretty well for Signor Morlandi!" said Norwood — "eleven hundred scudi for repairs to carriages — for destroying your patent axles, and replacing English varnish by the lacquer of a tea-tray — something less than two hundred and fifty pounds!"

"He is an obliging creature," said Lady Hester, "and always punctual."

"In that case we 'll deal generously with him. He shall have half his money, if he give a receipt in full."

"'Legendre, Coiffure; eight thousand francs.' Pas mal, Monsieur Legendre! — kid gloves and perfumes, Madonna bands, and Macassar oil, are costly things to deal in."

"That is really iniquitous," said Lady Hester. "I see every bouquet is put down at a hundred francs!"

"A conservatory, at that rate, is better property than a coal-mine. Shall we say one thousand francs for this honest coiffure?"

"Impossible. He would scorn such an offer."

"Pardon me. I know these people somewhat better and longer than you do; and so far even from suffering in his estimation — if that were a matter of any consequence — you will rise in his good opinion. An Italian always despises a dupe, but entertains a sincere respect for all who detect knavery. I 'll set him down for one thousand, to be increased to fifteen hundred if he 'll tell me how to cut down his neighbour, Guercini."

"What of Guercini? How much is his claim?"

"A trifle; under five thousand crowns."

"Nearly one thousand pounds!" exclaimed she.

"Say, rather, eleven hundred and upwards," said Norwood.

"It is incredible how little I 've had from him; a few trifling rings and brooches; some insignificant alterations and new settings; one or two little presents to Kate; and, I really believe, nothing more."

"We are getting deeper and deeper," said Nor-

wood, turning over the bills. Contardo, the wine-merchant, and Frisani, table-decker, are both large claimants. If pine-apples were the daily food of the servants' hall, they could scarcely cut a more formidable figure in the reckoning — indeed, if the whole establishment did nothing but munch them during all their leisure hours, the score need not be greater. Do you know, Hester, that the rogueries of the Continent are a far heavier infliction than the income-tax? and that the boasted economy of a foreign residence is sensibly diminished by the unfortunate fact, that one honest tradesman is not to be found from Naples to the North Pole. They are Spartans in deceit, and only disgraced whenever the rascality is detected. Now, it is quite absurd to read such an item as this: 'Bonbons and dried fruits, three hundred and seventy crowns!' Why, if your guests were stuffed with *marrons glacées*, this would be an exaggeration."

"You are very tiresome, Norwood," said she, peevishly. "I don't want to be told that these people are all knaves; their character for honesty is no affair of mine; if it were, Buccellini could easily mesmerise any of them and learn all his secrets. I only wish to get rid of them — it's very distressing to hear their dreadful voices, and see their more dreadful selves in the court beneath."

"The task is somewhat more difficult than I bargained for," said Norwood, thoughtfully. "I fancied a few 'hundreds' would suffice, but we must read 'thousands;' instead. In any case, I'll hold a conference with them, and see what can be done."

"Then — do so, then, and lose no time, for I see

Midchikoff's Chasseur below, and I'm sure the Prince is coming."

Norwood gave her a look which made her suddenly become scarlet, and then left the room without speaking.

If he had not been himself a debtor with the greater number of those who waited below, few could have acquitted themselves more adroitly in such a mission. He was an adept in that clever game by which duns are foiled and tradesmen mollified; he knew every little menace and every flattery to apply to them, when to soothe and when to snub them. All these arts he was both ready and willing to exercise, were it not for the unpleasant difficulty that his own embarrassments rendered him a somewhat dubious ambassador. In fact, as he himself phrased it — "It was playing advocate with one leg in the dock."

He lingered a little, therefore, as he went; he stopped on the landing of the stairs to peep out on the tumultuous assemblage beneath, like a general surveying the enemy's line before the engagement; nor was he over pleased to remark that little Purvis was bustling about among the crowd, note-book and pencil in hand, palpably taking evidence and storing up facts for future mention. As he was still looking, the great gate was thrown open with a crash, and a calèche, dirty and travel-stained, was whirled into the court by three steaming and panting posters. After a brief delay, a short, thickset figure, enveloped in travelling gear, descended, and putting, as it seemed, a few questions as to the meaning of the assembled throng, entered the house.

Curious to learn who, what, and whence the new

arrival came, Norwood hurried down stairs, but all that he could learn from the postilion was, that the stranger had posted from Genoa, using the greatest speed all the way, and never halting, save a few minutes for refreshment. The traveller was not accompanied by a servant, and his luggage bore neither name nor crest to give any clue as to his identity. That he was English, and that he had gone direct to Sir Stafford's apartments, was the whole sum of the Viscounts's knowledge; but even this seemed so worthy of remark, that he hastened back with the tidings to Lady Hester, instead of proceeding on his errand.

She treated the announcement with less interest. It might be Proctor — Sir Stafford's man. Was he tall, and black-whiskered? No, he was short; and, so far as Norwood saw, he thought him fair haired. "She knew of nobody to bear that description. It might be an English physician from Genoa — there was one there, or in Nice, she forgot exactly which, who was celebrated for treating gout, or sore eyes — she could not remember precisely, but it was certainly one or the other. On recollection, however, it was probably gout, because he had attended Lord Hugmore, who was blind."

"In that case," said Norwood, "Onslow would seem to be worse."

"Yes, poor man — much worse. 'George sat up with him the night before last, and said he suffered terribly. His mind used to wander at intervals too, and he spoke as if he was very unhappy."

"Unhappy — a man with upwards of thirty thousand a year, unhappy!" said Norwood, clasping his hands over his head as he spoke.

"You forget, my Lord, that there are other considerations than monied ones which weigh at least with *some* persons; and if Onslow's fortune be a princely one, he may still feel compunctious regrets for his detestable conduct to *me!*"

"Oh, I forgot *that!*" said Norwood, with a most laudable air of seriousness.

"It was very kind of you, my Lord — very considerate and very kind indeed, to forget it. Yet I should have fancied it was the very sentiment uppermost in the mind of any one: entering this chamber — witnessing the solitary seclusion of my daily life — beholding the resources by which the weary hours are beguiled — not to speak of the ravages which sorrow has left upon these features."

"On that score, at least, I can contradict you, Hester," said he, with a smile of flattering meaning. "It is now above eight years since first —"

"How can you be so tiresome?" said she, pettishly.

"Prince Midchikoff, my Lady, presents his compliments," said a servant, "and wishes to know if your Ladyship will receive him at dinner to-day, and at what hour?"

"How provoking! Yes — say, 'Yes, at eight o'clock,'" said she, walking up and down the room with impatience. "You 'll stay and meet him, Norwood; I know you 're not great friends; but no matter, George is so uncertain — he left us t' other day to entertain the Prince alone — Kate and myself — only fancy; and as he takes half-hour fits of silence, and Kate occasionally won't speak for a whole evening together, my part was a pleasant one."

"How Florence wrongs you both," said Norwood; "they say that no one is more agreeable to your Ladyship than the Midchikoff," said he, slowly and pointedly.

"As Miss Dalton's admirer — I hope rumour adds that," said she, hastily.

"What? are you really serious? Has the Dalton pretensions?"

"Perhaps not; but the Prince has," interrupted Lady Hester; "but you are forgetting these people all the while. Do pray do something — anything with them; and don't forget us at eight o'clock." And with this Lady Hester hurried from the room, as if admonished by her watch of the lateness of the hour; but really anxious to escape further interrogatory from the Viscount.

When Norwood reached the court, he was surprised to find it empty — not one of the eager creditors remained; but all was still and silent.

"What has become of these good people?" asked he of the Porter.

"The stranger who arrived in the calèche awhile ago spoke a few words to them, and they went."

This was all that he knew, and being a Porter — one of that privileged caste, whose prerogative it is never to reveal what takes place before their eyes — his present communication was remarkable.

"Would that the good genius had remembered *me* in his moment of generous abandonment!" muttered Norwood, as he took his road homeward to dress for dinner.

Little scrupulous about the means of getting out of a difficulty, provided it were only successful, Norwood

scarcely bestowed another thought upon the whole matter, and lounged along the streets as forgetful of the late scene as though it had passed twenty years before.

As the Viscount strolled along towards his lodgings, Kate Dalton, with trembling limbs and palpitating heart, threaded her way through the thronged streets, now wet and slippery from a thin rain that was falling. So long as her road lay through the less-frequented thorough-fares, her appearance excited little or no attention in the passers-by; but when she entered the Piazza Santa Trinitá, all a blaze with gas-lamps, and the reflected lights from brilliant shops, many stopped, turned, and gazed at the strange sight of a young and beautiful girl, attired in the very height of fashion, being alone and afoot at such an hour. Unaccountable even to mystery, as it seemed, there was something in her gait and carriage that at once repelled the possibility of a disparaging impression, and many touched or removed their hats respectfully as they made way for her to pass. To avoid the carriages, which whirled past in every direction and at tremendous speed, she passed close along by the houses, and, in doing so, came within that brilliant glare of light that poured from the glass doors of the great Café of the Piazza. It was exactly the hour when the idle loungers of Florence society — that listless class who form the staple of our club life in England — were swarming to talk of the plans of the evening, what resources of pleasure were available, and what receptions were open. The drizzling rain, and the cold, raw feeling of the air, prevented their being seated, as their custom was, before the doors, where in every attitude of

graceful languor they habitually smoked their cigars and discussed the passers-by, in all the plenitude of recreative indolence. The group consisted of men of every age and country.

There were Princes, and blacklegs, and adventurers; some with real rank and fortune; others as destitute of character as of means. Many owned names great and renowned in history; others bore designations only chronicled in the records of criminal jurisprudence. All were well dressed, and, so far as cursory notice could detect, possessed the ease and bearing of men familiar with the habits of good society. Although mixing in very distinct circles, here, at least, they met every day on terms of familiar equality, discussing the politics of the hour and the events of the world with seeming frankness and candour.

From a small chamber at the back of the Café a little tide of loungers seemed to ebb and flow, while the sharp rattling sound of a dice-box indicated the nature of the occupation that went forward there. The small apartment was thronged with spectators of the game, and even around the door several were standing, content to hear the tidings of a contest they could not witness.

"To sit upon the Ponte Carraja, and chuck rouleaux of gold into the Arno, would be to the full as amusing, and not a more costly pastime," said a sharp, ringing voice, which, once heard, there was no difficulty in recognising as Haggerstone's

"But Onslow plays well," said another.

"When he's in luck, Sir," said the Colonel. "Let him always have the winning horse to ride, and I

don't say he'll lose the saddle; but Maraffi would win on a donkey."

"Is he a Russian?" asked one.

"No, Sir, he's worse; he's a Greek. I know everything about him. His mother was a Finlander, and the father a Cephalonian. I don't think Satan himself would ask a better parentage."

"What luck! By Jove! I never saw such luck!" said a voice from within the door. "Onslow has no chance with him."

"Nor will you, Sir, if you persist in expressing your opinion in English," said Haggerstone. "Maraffi speaks every language, plays every game, and knows the use of every weapon, from a jereed to Joe Manton."

"I'll not test his abilities at any of them," said the other, laughing.

"*Per Baccho!* there goes something new," said a young Italian, from the window that looked into the street. "Who's she?"

"*Diantre!*" said the old Duc the Parivaux. "That is something very exquisite indeed. She was splashed by that carriage that passed, and I just saw her foot."

"She's the Prima Donna from Milan."

"She's the Cipriani. I know her figure perfectly."

"She's very like the Princesse de Raoule."

"Taller, and younger."

"And fifty times handsomer. What eyes! By Jove! I wish that drosky would never move on! She is regularly imprisoned there."

"You are very ungallant, gentlemen, I must say,"

said the young Count de Guilmard, the French Secretary of Legation, who, having finished his coffee and liqueur, coolly arranged his curls beneath his hat before the glass — "very ungallant indeed, not to offer an arm to an unprotected Princess. We Frenchmen understand our 'devoirs' differently." And, so saying, he passed out into the street, while the rest pressed up closer to the window to observe his proceedings.

"Cleverly done, Guilmard!" cried one. "See how he affects to have protected her from the pole of that carriage."

"She 'll not notice him" — "She will" — "She has" — "She hasn't" — "She is moving his way!" — "Not at all" — "She 's speaking!" — "There, I told you he 'd succeed" — "But he hasn't, though." Amid all these phrases, which rattled on more rapidly than we can write them, Onslow joined the party, one heavy venture on a single card having involved him in a tremendous loss.

"Is that a countrywoman of yours, Onslow?" asked a young Russian noble. "If so, the *entente cordiale* with France seems scarcely so secure as statesmen tell us."

Onslow gave one glance through the window, and dashed into the street with a bound like the spring of a wild animal. He threw himself between Guilmard and Kate. The Frenchman lifted his cane, and the same instant he fell backwards upon the pavement, rather hurled than struck down by the strong arm of the young Guardsman. Before the lookers-on could hasten out, George had hailed a carriage, and, assisting Kate in, took his seat beside her, and drove off.

So sudden was the whole incident, and so engrossing the terror of poor Kate's mind, that she saw nothing of what passed, and was merely conscious that by George's opportune coming she was rescued from the insolent attentions of the stranger.

"Did he speak to you? Did he dare to address you?" asked Onslow, in a voice which boiling passion rendered almost unintelligible.

"If he did, I know not," said she, as she covered her face with shame, and struggled against the emotion that almost choked her.

"He took your arm — he certainly laid hold of your hand!"

"It was all so rapid, that I can tell nothing," said she, sobbing; "and although my courage never failed me till you came, *then* I thought I should have fainted."

"But how came you alone and on foot, and at such an hour, too? Where had you been?"

These questions he put with a sort of stern resolution, that showed no evasive answer would rescue her.

"Did you leave home without a carriage, or even a servant?" asked he again, as no answer was returned to his former question.

"I did take a carriage in the morning; and — and —"

"Sent it away again," continued George, impetuously. "And where did you drive to — where pass the day?"

Kate hung her head in silence, while her heart felt as if it would burst from very agony.

"This is no idle curiosity of mine, Miss Dalton," said he, speaking with a slow and measured utterance.

"The society you have mixed with here is not above any reproach, nor beneath any suspicion. I insist upon knowing where you have been, and with whom? So, then, you refuse to speak — you will not tell. If it be Lady Hester's secret —"

"No, no! The secret is mine, and mine only. I swear to you, by all we both believe in, that it has no concern with any one save myself."

"And can you not confide it to me? Have I no right to ask for the confidence, Kate?" said he, with tenderness. "Know you any one more deeply and sincerely your friend than I am — more ready to aid, protect, or counsel you?"

"But this I cannot — must not tell you," said she, in accents broken by sobbing.

"Let me know, at least, enough to refute the insolence of an imputation upon your conduct. I cannot tamely sit by and hear the slanderous stories that, to-morrow or next day, will gain currency through the town."

"I cannot — I cannot," was all that she could utter.

"If not me, then, choose some other defender. Unprotected and undefended you must not be."

"I need none, Sir; none will asperse me!" said she, haughtily.

"What! you say this? while scarce five minutes since I saw you outraged — insulted in the open street."

A burst of tears, long repressed, here broke from Kate, and for some minutes her sobs alone were heard in the silence.

"I will ask but one question more, Miss Dalton,"

said George, slowly, as the carriage passed under the arched gateway of the Palace, "and then this incident is sealed to me for ever. Is this secret — whatever it be — in your own sole keeping; or is your confidence shared in by another?"

"It is," murmured Kate, below her breath.

"You mean that it is shared?" asked he, eagerly.

"Yes: Mr. Jekyl at least knows —"

"Jekyl!" cried George, passionately; "and is Alfred Jekyl your adviser and your confidant? Enough — you have told me quite enough," said he, dashing open the door of the carriage as it drew up at the door. He gave his hand to Kate to alight, and then, turning away, left her, without even a "good-by," while Kate hurried to her room, her heart almost breaking with agony.

"I shall be late, Nina," said she, affecting an air and voice of unconcern, as she entered her room; "you must dress me rapidly."

"Mademoiselle must have been too pleasantly engaged to remember the hour," said the other, with an easy pertness quite different from her ordinary manner. More struck by the tone than by the words themselves, Kate turned a look of surprise on the speaker.

"It is so easy to forget one's self at Morlache's, they say," added the girl, with a saucy smile; and although stung by the impertinence, Kate took no notice of the speech. "Mademoiselle will of course never wear that dress again," said Nina, as she contemptuously threw from her the mud-stained and rain-spotted dress she had worn that morning. "We have a Basque proverb,

Mademoiselle, about those who go out in a carriage and come back on foot."

"Nina, what do you mean by these strange words, and this still more strange manner?" asked Kate, with a haughtiness she had never before assumed towards the girl.

"I do not pretend to say that Mademoiselle has not the right to choose her confidants, but the Principessa de San Martello and the Duchessa di Rivoli did not think me beneath their notice."

"Nina, you are more unintelligible than ever," cried Kate, who still, through all the dark mystery of her words, saw the lowering storm of coming peril.

"I may speak too plainly — too bluntly, Mademoiselle, but I can scarcely be reproached with equivocating; and I repeat, that my former mistresses honoured me with their secret confidence, and they did wisely, too, for I should have discovered everything of myself, and my discretion would not have been fettered by a compact."

"But if I have no secrets," said Kate, drawing herself up with proud disdain, "and if I have no need either of the counsels or the discretion of my waiting-woman?"

"In that case," said Nina, quietly, "Mademoiselle has only perilled herself for nothing. The young lady who leaves her carriage and her maid to pass three hours at Morlache's, and returns thence, on foot, after nightfall, may truly say she has no secrets — at least so far as the city of Florence is concerned."

"This is insolence that you never permitted yourself before," said Kate, passionately.

"And yet, if I were Mademoiselle's friend instead of her servant, I should counsel her to bear it."

"But I will not," cried Kate, indignantly. "Lady Hester shall know of your conduct this very instant."

"One moment, Mademoiselle; just one moment," said Nina, interposing herself between Kate and the door. "My tongue is oftentimes too ready, and I say things for which I am deeply sorry afterwards; forgive me, I beg and beseech you, if I have offended; reject my counsels, disdain my assistance, if you will, but do not endanger yourself in an instant of anger. If you have but little control over your temper, *I* have even less over mine; pass out of that door as my enemy, and I am yours to the last hour of my life."

There was a strange and almost incongruous mixture of feeling in the way she uttered these words; at one moment abject in submission, and at the next hurling a defiance as haughty as though she were an injured equal. The conflict of the girl's passion, which first flushed, now left her pale as death, and trembling in every limb. Her emotion bespoke the most intense feeling, and Kate stood like one spell-bound before her. Her anger had already passed away, and she looked with almost a sense of compassion at the excited features and heaving bosom of the Spanish girl.

"You wrong yourself and me, too, Nina," said Kate Dalton, at last. "I have every trust in your fidelity, but I have no occasion to test it."

"Be it so, Mademoiselle," replied the other, with a curtsey.

"Then all is forgotten," said Kate, affecting a gaiety she could not feel; "and now let me hasten down stairs, for I am already late."

"The Prince will have thought it an hour, Mademoiselle," said the girl; the quiet demureness of her manner depriving the words of any semblance of impertinence. If Kate looked gravely, perhaps some little secret source of pleasure lay hid within her heart, and in the glance she gave at her glass, there was an air of conscious triumph that did not escape the lynx-eyed Nina.

"My lady is waiting dinner, Miss Dalton," said a servant, as he tapped at the door; and Kate, with many a trouble warring in her breast, hastened down stairs, in all the pride of a loveliness that never was more conspicuous.

CHAPTER XIV.

"Proposals."

KATE found Lady Hester, the Prince, and Mr. Jekyl awaiting her as she entered the drawing-room, all looking even more bored and out of sorts than people usually do who have been kept waiting for their dinner.

"Everybody has sworn to be as tiresome and disagreeable as possible to-day," said Lady Hester. "George said he'd dine here, and is not coming; Lord Norwood promised, and now writes me word that an unavoidable delay detains him; and here comes Miss Dalton — the mirror of punctuality when all else are late — a full half-hour after the time. There, dear — no excuses nor explanations about all you have been doing — the thousand calls you've made, and shops you've ransacked. I'm certain you've had a miserable day of it."

Kate blushed deeply, and dreaded to meet Jekyl's eye; but when she did, that little glassy orb was as blandly meaningless as any that ever rattled in the head of a Dutch doll. Even as he gave his arm to lead her in to dine, nothing in his manner or look betrayed anything like a secret understanding between them. A bystander might have deemed him a new acquaintance.

"Petits diners" have, generally, the prerogative of agreeability — they are the chosen reunions of a

few intimates, who would not dilute their pleasantry even by a single bore. They are also the bright occasions for those little culinary triumphs which never can be attempted in a wider sphere. Epigrams, whether of lamb or language, require a select and special jury to try them; but just in the same proportion as the success of such small parties is greater, so is their utter failure when by any mischance there happens a break down in the good spirits or good humour of the company.

We have said enough to show that the ladies, at least, might be excused for not displaying those thousand attractions of conversation which all centre on the one great quality — ease of mind. The Prince was more than usually out of sorts, a number of irritating circumstances having occurred to him during the morning. A great Sovereign — on whom he had lavished the most profuse attentions — had written him a letter of thanks, through his private secretary, enclosing a snuff-box, instead of sending him an autograph, and the first class of the national order. His glover, in Paris, had forgotten to make his right hand larger than the left, and a huge packet that had just arrived was consequently useless. His *chef* had eked out a salmi of ortolans by a thrush, and it was exactly that unluckly morsel the Cardinal had helped himself to at breakfast, and immediately sent his plate away in disappointment. Rubion, too, his ninth secretary, had flatly refused to marry a little *danseuse* that had just come out in the ballet — a piece of insolence and rebellion on his part not to be tolerated; and when we add to these griefs an uncomfortable neckcloth, and the tidings of an insurrection in a Russian province

where he owned immense property in mines, his state of irritability may be leniently considered.

Jekyl, if truth were told, had as many troubles of his own to confront as any of the rest. If the ocean he sailed in was not a great Atlantic — his bark was still but a cockle-shell — his course in life required consummate skill and cleverness, and yet never could be safe even with that. Notwithstanding all this, he alone was easy, natural, and agreeable — not as many an inferior artist would have been agreeable, by any over-effort to compensate for the lack of co-operation in others, and thus make their silence and constraint but more palpable — his pleasantry was tinged with the tone of the company, and all his little smartnesses were rather insinuated than spoken. Quite satisfied if the Prince listened, or Lady Hester smiled — more than rewarded when they once both laughed at one of his sallies — he rattled on about the court and the town talk, the little scandals of daily history, and the petty defections of those dear friends they nightly invited to their houses. While thus, as it were, devoting himself to the amusement of the others, his real occupation was an intense study of their thoughts, what was uppermost in their minds, and in what train their speculations were following. He had long suspected the Prince of being attracted by Kate Dalton — now he was certain of it. Accustomed almost from childhood to be flattered on every hand, and to receive the blandest smiles of beauty everywhere, Midchikoff's native distrust armed him strongly against such seductions, and had Kate followed the path of others, and exerted herself to please him, her failure would have been certain. It was her actual indifference — her

perfect carelessness on the subject — was the charm to his eyes, and he felt it quite a new and agreeable sensation not to be made love to.

Too proud of her own Dalton blood to feel any elevation by the marked notice of the great Russian, she merely accorded him so much of her favour as his personal agreeability seemed to warrant; perhaps no designed flattery could have been so successful! Another feeling, also, enhanced his admiration of her. It was a part of that barbaric instinct which seemed to sway all his actions, to desire the possession of whatever was *unique* in life. Those forms or fancies of which nature stamps but one, and breaks the die — these were a passion with him. To possess a bluer turquoise than any King or Kaiser, — to own an Arab of some colour never seen before, — to have a picture by some artist who never painted but one; but whether it were a gem, a vase, a weapon, a diamond, or a dog, its value had but one test — that it had none its exact equal. Now, Kate Dalton realised these conditions more than any one he had ever met. Her very beauty was peculiar; combining, with much of feminine softness and delicacy, a degree of determination and vigour of character, that to Midchikoff smacked of queenly domination. There was a species of *fierté* about her that distinguished her among other women. All that he had seen done by an illustrious title and a diamond tiara, she seemed capable of effecting in the simplest costume and without an effort. All these were wonderful attractions to his eyes; and if he did not fall in love, it was simply because he did not know. He, however, did what to him served as substitute for the passion; he coveted an object which should form one

of the greatest rarities of his collection, and the possession of whom would give him another title to that envy — the most delicious tribute the world could render him.

There were some drawbacks to his admiration; her birth was not sufficiently illustrious; his own origin was too recent to make an alliance of this kind desirable, and he wished that she had been a Princess, — even "*à main gauche*" of some Royal House. Jekyl had done his best, by sundry allusions to Irish greatness, and the blood of various monarchs of Munster and Connaught, in times past; but the Prince was incredulous as to Hibernian greatness; probably the remembrance of an Irish diamond, once offered him for sale, had tinged his mind with this sense of disparagement as to all Irish magnificence. Still Kate rose above every detracting influence, and he thought of the pride in which he should parade her through Europe as his own.

Had she been a barb, or a bracelet, an antique cup, or a Sevres jar, he never would have hesitated about the acquisition. Marriage, however, was a more solemn engagement; and he did not quite fancy any purchase that cost more than mere money. Nothing but the possibility of losing her altogether could have overcome this cautious scruple; and Jekyl had artfully insinuated such a conjuncture. "George Onslow's attentions were," he said, "quite palpable; and although up to this Miss Dalton did not seem to give encouragement, who could tell what time and daily intercourse might effect. There was Norwood, too, with the rank of Peeress in his gift; there was no saying how an ambitious girl might be tempted by that bait." In

fact, the Prince had no time to lose; and, although nothing less accorded with his tastes than what imposed haste, he was obliged to bestir himself on this occasion.

If we have dwelt thus long upon the secret thoughts of the company, it is because their conversation was too broken and unconnected for recording. They talked little, and that little was discursive. An occasional allusion to some social topic, — a chance mention of their approaching departure from Florence, — some reference to Como and its scenery, — formed the whole; and then, in spite of Jekyl, whose functions of "fly-wheel" could not keep the machine a-moving, long pauses would intervene, and each lapse into a silence, apparently more congenial than conversation. All this while Jekyl seemed to be reading the complex scheme of doubt, irresolution, and determination that filled Midchikoff's mind. The stealthy glances of the Russian's eyes towards Kate, — the almost painful anxiety of his manner, to see if she noticed him while speaking, — his watchful observance of her, in her every accent and gesture, — told Jekyl the struggle that was then passing within him. He had seen each of these symptoms before, though in a less degree, when the coveted object was a horse or a picture, and he well knew how nothing but the dread of a competition for the prize would rouse him from this state of doubt and uncertainty.

The evening dragged slowly over, and it was now late, when Lord Norwood made his appearance. With a brief apology for not coming to dinner, he drew Jekyl to one side, and slipping an arm within his, led him into an adjoining room.

"I say, Jekyl," whispered he, as they retired out of earshot of the others, "here 's a pretty mess Onslow 's got in. There has been a *fracas* in the street about Miss Dalton. How she came there at such a time, and alone, is another matter; and George has struck Guilmard — knocked him down, by Jove, and no mistake; and they 're to meet to-morrow morning. Of course, there was nothing else for it; a blow has but one reparation — George will have to stand the fire of the first shot in Europe."

Jekyl hated a duel. Had he been a member of the Peace Congress, he could not have detested the arbitrement of arms more heartily. It involved partisanship, it severed intimacies, it barred general intercourse, and often closed up for a whole season the pleasantest houses of a town. The announcement of a strict blockade never struck a mercantile community with more terror. To Norwood, the prospect was directly the opposite. Not only an adept in all the etiquette and ceremonial of such meetings, he liked to see his name circulated in these affairs, as a kind of guarantee of his readiness to seek a similar reparation for injury. He had trusted for many a year on his dexterity at twelve paces, and he never missed an opportunity of sustaining the "prestige" of a "dead shot."

It was, then, with an ardour of amateurship that he narrated the various little preliminary steps which had already been taken. Merkheim, the Austrian Secretary, had called on him, on the part of Guilmard; and as, in a case so clear, there was little to arrange, the only difficulty lay in the choice of weapons.

"The Frenchman claims the sword," said Norwood; "and it is always awkward to decline that proposition for a soldier. But I suppose George has about as much chance with one weapon as the other?"

"You think he'll kill him, my Lord?"

"I think so. If the offence had been less flagrant or less public, possibly not. But a blow! — to be struck down in the open street! I don't see how he can do less."

"What a break-up it will cause here!" said Jekyl, with a nod of his head in the direction of the drawing-room.

"It will send them all back to England, I suppose?"

"I suppose it will," added Jekyl, mournfully.

"What a bore! It's particularly unpleasant for me, for I hold some half dozen of George's acceptances, not due yet; and, of course, the Governor will never think of acquitting them."

"I conclude it is inevitable — the meeting, I mean?" said Jekyl.

"To be sure it is. Onslow took care of that! By the way, Jekyl, how came she there at such an hour, and alone, too?"

"She had been shopping, I fancy, and missed the carriage. There was some blunder, I have heard, about the coachman drawing up at the wrong door."

"No go, Master Jekyl. Don't try it on with me, old fellow. You know all about it, if you like to tell."

"I assure you, my Lord, you give me a credit I don't deserve."

"You know the whole story from beginning to end, Jekyl. I'd back you against the field, my boy."

The other shook his head with an air of supreme innocence.

"Then George knows it?" added Norwood, half asserting, half asking the question.

"He may, my Lord, for aught I can tell."

"If so, he's treating me unfairly," said Norwood, rising and pacing the room. "As his friend in this affair, there should be no reserve or concealment with me. You can surely say that much, Jekyl, eh? What a close fellow you are!"

"It is so easy not to blab when one has nothing to tell," said Jekyl, smiling.

"Come, there is something you *can* tell me. Where does that small corridor behind George's apartment lead to? There is a door at the end of it, and, I fancy, a stair beyond it."

"That, if I mistake not, leads up towards Lady Hester — No, I remember now; it leads to Miss Dalton's room."

"Just so; I could have sworn it."

"Why so, my Lord?" asked Jekyl, whose curiosity was now excited to the utmost.

"That's *my* secret, Master Jekyl."

"But the door is always locked and bolted from within," said Jekyl, "and there is no keyhole on the outside."

"I'll not stand pumping, Jekyl. If you had been frank with *me*, perhaps I should have been as open with *you*."

For an instant Jekyl hesitated what course to follow. It might be that Norwood really knew something of

great importance. It might be that his discovery was valueless. And yet, if it concerned Kate in any way, the information would be all important, his great game being to make her a Princess, and yet preserve such an ascendancy over her as would render her his own slave.

"She 's a strange girl that Dalton," said Norwood. "I wish she had about forty thousand pounds."

"She may have more than that yet, my Lord," said Jekyl, dryly.

"How do you mean, Jekyl. Is there any truth in that story about the Irish property? Has she really a claim on the estate? Tell me all you know, old fellow, and I 'll be on the square with you throughout."

Jekyl, who in his remark had darkly alluded to the prospect of Kate's marriage with Midchikoff, now saw that Norwood had totally misconceived his meaning, and, like a shrewd tactician, determined to profit by the blunder.

"Come, Jekyl, be frank and aboveboard. What *are* her prospects?"

"Better than I have told you, my Lord," replied he, coolly. "If I cannot — for I am not at liberty to explain why — I am quite ready to pledge my word of honour to the truth of what I say, or, what your Lordship will think more of, to back my opinion by a bet."

"By Jove! that *is* news!" said the Viscount, leaning his head on the chimney to reflect. "You are such a slippery dog, Master Jekyl, you have so many turnings and windings in you, one is never quite sure with you; but supposing now, for argument's sake,

that one thought of making this fair damsel a Peeress, is there no hitch in the affair — no screw loose that one ought to look to?"

"In her birth, my Lord?"

"No; d—n her birth. I mean about the tin."

"I believe, my Lord, that I can save you all speculation on the subject, when I say that pursuit would be hopeless there. The Midchikoff has gained the start, and must win in a canter."

"That Tartar fellow! nonsense, man; I know better than that. He 'll never marry anything under royalty; the fellow's mother was a serf, and he must wash that spot out of his blood whenever he can."

"You are mistaken, my Lord. He only waits to be certain of being accepted, to offer himself."

"Refuse him!" said Norwood, laughing; "there 's not that girl in Europe would refuse him. If every decoration he wore on his breast were a stripe of the knout upon his back, his wealth would cover all."

"The Prince would give half his fortune to be assured of all you say, my Lord," said Jekyl, gravely.

"By Jove! one might make a good thing of it, even that way," said Norwood, half aloud. "I say, Jekyl," added he, louder, "how much are you to have? — nay, nay, man, there 's no impertinence in the question, we are both too much men of the world for that. It 's quite clear that this is *your* scheme. Now, what 's the damage?"

"My Lord, you are as flattering to my abilities as unjust to my character."

"We 'll suppose all that said," broke in Norwood, impatiently; "and now we come back to the original

question — whether I cannot afford to be as liberal as the Russian. Only be explicit, and let us understand each other."

"My Lord, I will not insult myself by believing I comprehend you," said Jekyl, calmly.

And before Norwood could detain him he left the room.

"Jekyl, come back, man! just hear me out — you've mistaken me! Confound the cur," muttered the Viscount, "with his hypocritical affectation, — as if I did not know his *métier* as well as I know my boot-maker's."

Norwood walked noiselessly to the door of the *salon* and peeped in. Lady Hester, the Prince, and Jekyl, were in earnest conversation in one quarter, while Kate sat apart, apparently engaged with her embroidery-frame, but, in reality, too deeply sunk in thought to notice the bright tints before her. Norwood entered listlessly, and strolling across the room, took a place beside her. She moved slightly as he drew forward his chair, and then, as she drew back her flounce, Norwood saw that it was of deep black lace. He coolly took out his pocket-book, wherein he had deposited the torn fragment, and regarding it with attention, saw that it perfectly corresponded with the dress. So leisurely, and with such circumspection did he proceed, that several minutes elapsed before he looked up.

"You are meditative, my Lord, to-night," said Kate, at last, making an effort to relieve an awkward situation; "what are you thinking of, pray?"

"Admiring your dress, Miss Dalton, which strikes me as singularly beautiful and becoming."

"Great praise this, from such an acknowledged judge as Lord Norwood," said she, smiling.

"I prefer it to antique lace, which in general is too heavy and cumbrous for my taste; I like these fine and delicate tissues, so frail and gossamer-like — not but their frailty, like all other frailty, incurs occasionally a heavy penalty; as here, for instance, you see, this has been torn."

"So it has," said Kate, with confusion, "and I never noticed it. What a quick eye you must have, my Lord."

"And a sharp ear too, Miss Dalton," said he, significantly; "in fact, I am one of those people whose every-day faculties do duty for what in other goes by the name of cleverness. It's a great pity," said he, looking down at the dress; "you see, Miss Dalton, what a false step can do."

"And yet I cannot remember when this occurred," said she, assuming to misunderstand his equivocal expression.

"Not recal it — not a clue to the mishap?" asked he, shrewdly.

"None," said she, blushing at the pertinacity with which he clung to the theme; "but it's of no consequence."

"Would Miss Dalton think it very singular if I should be able to assist her memory? Would she accept the service as kindly as it was proffered, too?"

"Really, my Lord, you begin to speak in riddles," said she, more than ever piqued at his persistance.

"And yet," said he, following out the thread of his own thoughts, "I am assuredly as safe a counsellor as Alfred Jekyl."

Kate grew deadly pale, but never replied to this speech.

"And certainly," resumed he, "the man who speaks in his own name should ever take precedence of an envoy."

"My Lord," said she, firmly, "the very little which I can understand of your words, implies a pretension to knowledge and influence over me, which I disdain to accept; but still I cannot believe that you seriously mean to insult me."

"Of course not," said he; "I have come on a very different errand. If I did passingly allude to bygones, it was to show you that you can afford to be candid when I am frank. We too, united, would walk over the course, and no mistake — that's what I was coming to. I don't mean to say that the Russian is not richer — eh, gad! there's no disputing that — still, as to rank, a Peer of Great Britain, I take it, is the equal of any man. Not to remind you of the old adage about 'a bird in the hand,' — I speak frankly, because you are your own mistress."

"Kate, if Lord Norwood will excuse you, come to me for one instant," cried Lady Hester.

"Just say yes, before you go — or, if not yes, tell me that I have ground for hope," whispered Norwood; but she arose without speaking.

"I'll not stand a 'hedge,' by Jove!" said Norwood, sulkily; "play or pay — nothing else for me."

"Allow me to pass you, my Lord," said Kate, courteously.

"One word — off or on — Miss Dalton," said he, rising, and affecting to make way, while he still barred

the passage. A proud, disdainful smile was all the reply she vouchsafed.

"All right," said he, insolently; "only remember how we stand, Miss Dalton, and whenever you want to repair the mischance of your lace flounce, don't forget the piece is in my keeping;" and he opened the pocket-book as he spoke, and exhibited the fragment before her. Sick with a terror she could neither explain nor realise, she lay back again in her chair unable to move, while Norwood glided quietly away and left the room.

"Dear Kate, have you forgotten me all this time," said Lady Hester, whom Kate now perceived was alone on the sofa; Midchikoff and Jekyl having retired into an adjoining gallery, where they walked slowly along side by side, deep in conversation.

"You shouldn't have suffered Norwood to engross your attention in that manner, my dear. The Prince has been quite put out by it, and at such a moment, too, — and how flushed you are. What has he been saying?"

"I can scarcely remember," said Kate, confusedly.

"Well, it's of no consequence, dear, because I have got something to tell you that would speedily make you forget it. You know, Kate, how I always prophesied wonderful things for you, just as I did before for poor Georgina Elderton, and she married a Rajah afterwards, and died Begum of something ending in 'Bad.' Indeed, I might say it ended in bad for herself, poor dear, for I believe she was poisoned. But, to come back, I always said that you, also, would have astonishing luck. I told Sir Stafford so.

The first day I saw you, 'She 'll be like Georgina,' I said. "You 'll see that girl in a wonderful position one of these days.' It is not that men care for their wives more than formerly, — I rather fancy the reverse, but they have got a most intense passion just now for beauty. Wealth and good blood were once the only requisites, but they are both disregarded now, in comparison with good looks. I suppose the fashion won't last — it would be very absurd if it should — but, while it is the mode, one ought to profit by it. Just as I am wearing all those horrid old brocades of my great grand aunt's, with odious flowers of crimson and yellow, now that the taste in dress is 'rococo,' but of course in a year or two people will recover their senses again, and pretty girls without portion be left for subalterns in the line, as Providence intended they should. Don't you think so, dear?"

The brief question at the end of this long rambling speech would possibly have puzzled Kate to reply to, had not Lady Hester been far too much occupied in her own speculations to care for a rejoinder.

"You 'll hear people talk a deal of nonsense about unequal marriages, and they 'll quote Heaven knows what instances of girls, generally Irish ones, picking up Princes and Royal Dukes, and all ending unhappily. Don't believe a word of it, dearest; there 's never misery where there 's large fortune. The people who cry in velvet always shed rose-water tears, that don't hurt the skin or spoil the complexion. Not that I can say so of myself," added she, with a deep sigh; "but I am a creature apart. I fervently trust nature does not often form similar ones. Buccellini told me that I had a fifth pair of nerves — I assure you he

did. It was a very shocking thing, and probably he ought never to have mentioned it to me; but it perfectly explains the excessive sensibility of my whole nature — doesn't it, dear?"

Kate smiled assent, and Lady Hester went on.

"Then, as to religion, my dear, I'm afraid, indeed, we all think too little about it. I'm sure I'm quite shocked at what I see in society. It was only the other night, Lady Grace Morton kept her seat when the Cardinal was speaking to her. I apologised to him for it afterwards, and he said, with such a sweet smile, 'If these Protestants would only give us back our churches, we'll forgive their keeping their chairs.' The 'mot' was very pretty, in French, and well turned — wasn't it? Of course, then, you'll make no obstacle about the Greek Church, which I believe is exactly like your own, only that the Priest has a beard, which *I* think more becoming. It looks affectionate, too; it always gives one the idea of devotion, a girl changing her faith for her husband; and really, in this tiresome age we live in, a new religion is the only new thing one ever hears of. Your excellent family — that sweet sister, and the dear old Papa — will probably make a fuss about it; but you know, after all, how absurd that is; and if you were to marry a Chinese, there's no saying what strange creatures you'd have to pray to. You'll have to go to Russia, but only for presentation; that over, the Prince will obtain a renewal of his permission to reside abroad; still, if you have to pass a winter at St. Petersburgh, it will be far from disagreeable. The women are too fond of caviar and high play; but they dress just as well as in Paris, and wear better diamonds. Midchikoff's jewels are un-

equalled; and, now that I think of it, there 's one thing I 've set my heart on, and you must positively promise to give me, — a little stiletto with an emerald hilt and handle. I have pined for it — there 's no other word — these three years. He wore it in London, and I have never had it out of my thoughts since. You can afford to be very generous, dearest. How I envy you that pleasure! and the delight you 'll feel in providing for poor Papa and Mary — no, Elizabeth, I mean; how absurd, I should say, Ellen. It was something about that tale of Elizabeth, the Exile of Siberia, was running in my mind. The Prince will do whatever you suggest, and, indeed, he has already hinted about your brother Frank joining the Russian service. He 'll have him named an officer in the Emperor's Guard. You must insist, too, upon La Rocca being your own — settled upon yourself. They tell me it 's the sweetest spot in the world; and I 'll always live there when you don't want it. I mention this about the settlement, because there 's no saying how men will behave. I 'm sure I never could have anticipated such a return as I have met with from Sir Stafford. And then, you know, with a Russian, one cannot be too guarded. Don't you agree with me? Well, never mind, you 'll perhaps come round to my opinion later. But here comes the Prince, and it will be as well you should retire, dearest. I 'll see you in your dressing-room, and tell you everything."

And with this assurance Kate retired, with a head and heart as full as ever young lady's felt.

Kate was hastening to her room, when a short, quick step behind her made her turn round, and she saw Purvis endeavouring to overtake her.

"Oh, I have you at last," said he, puffing for breath; "and what a ch—chase I've had for it; I've been in five rooms already, and nearly had a f—f—fight with that Frenchwoman of Lady Hester's. She's a regular T—T—Tartar, she is, and almost boxed my ears for looking into a small case where my lady's r—ringlets are kept; ha! ha! ha! I saw them, though — two long and two short, and a pl—pl—plait for the back of the head. How she m—m—makes up at night!"

"I must say that you have the strangest mode of requiting hospitality," said Kate, haughtily.

"It's all very well to talk of hospi — hospi — hospi —" Here a fit of gaping brought on coughing, which, after a violent struggle, ended in the forced utterance of the last syllable of the word, but with such fatigue and exhaustion that he seemed scarcely able to continue; at last, however, he did resume. "It's all very well to talk of that, but we got in here by our own cl—cl—cleverness; at least by Zoe's."

"Less good-natured persons would find another word for it, Mr. Purvis."

"So they would. Haggerstone called it a Ricketty stratagem. No matter; *we're* in — ha! ha! ha! — and *he's* out. The pr—pr—proof of the pu—pu—pudding" —

"Will you excuse me, Sir, if I say I must leave you?"

"Don't go, don't go; I've something very important to — to tell you. And first, Zoe — my sister Zoe — wants to see you. The cook has been most im—im—impertinent to her. She says it was ginger

he put in the macca—macca—macca—roni, instead of P—P—Parmesan; all his truffles are only Piedmontese. That isn't all: don't be in such a h—hurry. They 've changed the wine, too. We had Ch—Ch—Chambertin yesterday, and they 've given us P—Pomard to-day. How is that to be borne?"

"I really see but one remedy for it, Sir," said Kate, scornfully.

"So Zoe said; that 's exactly her opinion. They must be sent away. Zoe knows a very ti—ti—tidy cook. He 's not a — a top-sawyer, you know, but he can r—roast a bit of beef, and makes a c—capital rice-pudding, and he 'll come for six dollars a month. Wouldn't that be a sa—saving? Zoe told him to c—call to-day, and speak to La—Lady Hester."

"He will find that difficult, Sir," said Kate, dryly.

"And as for the b—butler, such a J—J—Jack-a-napes I never saw; and Zoe would advise you to take little Pierretto — the fellow you see every day at the Pergola; he sells the tickets outside the door. He looks r—r—ragged enough now, but when he 's dressed —"

"You must see, Sir," interposed Kate, "that these are all details in which it would be both indelicate and impertinent for me to intrude an opinion about."

"Not when you li — live in the house; not when you 're dome — dome — domesticated with the family. We 're all in the same bo — boat now; and Zoe says somebody must steer it. Now Lizetta, Zoe's maid, would keep the k — keys herself."

"Pray remember, Sir, this is Lady Hester Onslow's house."

"Egad! it w — won't be long so, if she goes on as she 's d — doing. Martha saw the meat-cart come in this morning, and I had a p — p — peep into the servants' hall when the fl — flunkies were feeding, and and such w — w — waste, such re — reckless —"

"Good evening, Mr. Purvis; I cannot stay longer," said Kate. And, before he could interpose a word, she hastened from the spot, and, passing rapidly up the stairs, gained her own room, leaving Purvis to bethink him over the mass of things he had not touched upon, and on which he had mainly intended to debate.

CHAPTER XV.

An Arrival.

Let us go back a few hours in our history, and follow the short and burly figure which, emerging from the travelling-carriage in the courtyard of the Palace, pushed his way through the noisy throng of duns, and entered the house.

"How are you Proctor — how is your master?" said he, as he threw off his great-coat, and unrolled a capacious muffler from his throat. "How is Sir Stafford?"

"Oh, Doctor Grounsell, glad you've come, Sir. It will be a real pleasure to my master to see you again, Sir."

"How is he, man — how's the gout?"

"Poorly — very poorly, Sir. Things have gone badly here, Doctor, since you left us," said he, with a sigh.

"Yes, yes; I know it all; I have heard all about that. But his health — tell me of his health?"

"Greatly broken, Sir. No sleep o' nights without opium, and no real rest even with that."

"And his spirits?"

"Broken, too, Sir. He's not what you remember him, Sir, nor anything like it. No pleasant joke, Sir, when anything goes amiss, as it used to be; no turning it off with his merry laugh! He's fretful and impatient about the merest trifles; and he that never

wanted attendance, is now always complaining that he 's neglected, and deserted, and forsaken by all the world."

"Does the Captain come often to see and sit with him?"

"Every day, Sir; but these visits do rather harm than good. Sir Stafford is vexed at what goes on in the house; and Master George — I don't know how it is — but he don't calm him down, and they have often-times angry words together; not but my master is frequently in the wrong, and taxes the young gentleman with what he can't help; for, you see, Sir, my Lady —"

"D — n —! I mean, tell me about Sir Stafford; it is of him I want to hear. Does he read?"

"He makes me read to him every day, Sir, all about the money-market and railroad shares; sometimes twice over, indeed; and when I ask if he wouldn't like to hear about what goes on in politics, he always says, 'No, Proctor, let 's have the City article again.'"

"And his letters — doesn't he read them?"

"The Captain reads them for him, Sir; and now and then writes the answers, for he can't hold a pen himself! Oh, you 'll not know him when you see him! He that was so large and fine a man, I lift him in and out of bed as if he were a baby."

"Has he no acquaintance here?"

"None, Sir."

"Are there no inquiries after his health?"

"Yes, Sir; there 's plenty of people he used to give money to when he was up and about — poor actors, and painters, and the like — they come every day to know how he is. Some of them leave begging letters,

which I never give him; but most go away without a word."

"And his countrymen here: are there none who ask after him?"

"No, Sir. The only English we ever see visit my Lady, and never come to this side of the house at all."

"Does Miss Dalton come to inquire for him?"

"Every morning, and every night, too, Sir. I suppose it must be without my Lady's orders, or even knowledge; for once, when Sir Stafford was sitting up in his dressing-room, and I asked her if she wouldn't like to come in and sit a few minutes with him, she turned away without speaking; and I saw, from her manner, that she was crying."

"What are all these people outside — who are they?"

"My Lady's tradespeople, Sir. They've heard she's going for a few weeks to Como, and they've come with all their bills, as if she was a runaway."

"Go and tell them to leave this — send them away, Proctor. It would do your master great injury were he to overhear them. Say that everything shall be paid in a day or two; that Sir Stafford remains here, and is responsible for all."

Proctor hastened out on his errand; and the Doctor sat down and covered his face with his hands.

"Poor Stafford! is all your trustful affection come to this? Is it thus that your unbounded generosity, your noble hospitality are requited?"

When Proctor returned, he proceeded to detail, for the Doctor's information, the various events which had occurred during his absence. With most, Grounsell

was already acquainted, and listened to the particulars without surprise or emotion.

"So it is — so it is," muttered he to himself; "there may be more cant of virtue, a greater share of hypocrisy in our English morals, but, assuredly, these things do not happen with us as we see them here. There would seem a something enervating in the very air of the land, that a man like him should have sunk down into this besotted apathy! When can I see him, Proctor?"

"He's dozing just now, Sir; but about midnight he wakes up, and asks for his draught. If that won't be too late for you —"

"Too late for me! Why, what else have I travelled for, night and day, without intermission? Be cautious, however, about how you announce me; perhaps it would be better I should see the Captain first."

"You'll scarcely find him at home, Sir, at this hour; he generally comes in between three and four."

"Show me to his room. I'll write a few lines for him in case we don't meet."

Proctor accompanied the Doctor across the court-yard, and, guiding him up a small stair, reached the terrace off which George Onslow's apartment opened. The window-shutters of the room were not closed, nor the curtains drawn; and in the bright light of several candles that shone within, Grounsell saw two figures seated at a table, and busily engaged in examining the details of a case of pistols which lay before them.

"That will do, Proctor," said Grounsell; "you may leave me now. I'll be with you at twelve." And thus saying, he gently pushed him towards the door

of the terrace, which he closed and bolted after him, and then noiselessly returned to his former place.

There were few things less congenial to Grounsell's nature than playing the spy. It was a part he thoroughly detested; nor did he think that it admitted of defence or palliation; still, the whole habit of his mind through life had impressed him with a disparaging opinion of himself. The limited sphere of his duties, the humble routine of his daily walk, and the very few friendships he had inspired, all tended to increase this impression, till at last he looked upon himself as one who could only be useful by the sacrifice of personal feeling and the abnegation of all self-esteem; and thus he would have declined to know another man for what he deemed of no consequence in himself. His fault was not thinking too well of others, but thinking too meanly of himself.

The scene before him now was enough to suggest deep anxiety. Notes and letters littered the floor and the table; the embers of a large fire of papers lay on the hearth; open drawers and boxes stood on every side; all betokening preparation, the object of which the pistol-case sufficiently indicated. As they sat with their backs to the window, Grounsell could not recognise the figures; but the voice of one proclaimed him to be George Onslow.

"And where is this place — on the way to Arezzo?" asked he.

"No; on the opposite side of the city, off the high road to Bologna. It is a little park, surrounding a summer palace of the Grand Duke, they call Pratolino," said the other. "They all agree that it is the best spot to be found; no molestation, nor interference

of any kind; and a capital breakfast of fresh trout to be had at the inn."

"An interesting consideration for such as have good appetites," said Onslow, laughing.

"I never saw a Frenchman who had not, on such an occasion," rejoined the other, snapping the pistol, as he spoke. "I like these straight stocks; you are almost always certain of your man, with a stiff arm and a low aim."

"I don't know that I've forgotten anything, Norwood," said Onslow, rising and pacing the room with folded arms.

"You've written to the Governor?"

"Yes; and mentioned those acceptances," said Onslow, with a sneering severity that the other never seemed to notice. "You're quite safe, whatever happens."

"Hang it, man, I wasn't thinking of that; curse the money, it never entered my thoughts."

"My father will pay it," said George, dryly, and continued his walk.

"As you have alluded to it, I hope you spoke of it as a loan — anything like a play transaction suggests a mess of scandal and stories."

"I have called it a debt, and that is quite sufficient."

"All right — whatever you like. And now about this girl. Do you intend to let this mystery continue, or do you think that, under the circumstances, Lady Hester should still retain her as a friend and companion?"

"I know of nothing to her disparagement, nor have I yet met one who does. That there are circumstances which she does not deem fitting to intrust to my keeping is no just cause of allegation against her."

"You are very honourable to say so, George; but I must confess, it is more than she deserves at your hands."

"How do you mean?"

"That she means to take the Russian — that's all."

"Well, and why not? Would not such a match be a brilliant one for a girl of much higher rank and pretension?"

"What's the use of all this fencing, man?" said Norwood, half angrily. "*I* know better how matters stand. Do you remember the night you lost so heavily at Macao? Well, I was lying stretched on that sofa, yonder, by the light of the fire only, when the door opened, and she stepped gently in."

"What, Kate Dalton?"

"Yes, Kate Dalton. Oh! impossible if you like — deny it as much as you please, but *she* has not equal hardihood, that I can tell you; and if she had, here is the proof that could condemn her — this fragment of her lace flounce was caught in the door as she banged it in her escape; and this very evening I compared it with the dress in question; aye, and showed her the rent from which it came."

Twice did George compel Norwood to repeat over this story; and then sat down, overwhelmed with sorrow and shame.

"You swear to me, then, Onslow, that you never saw her here — never knew of her knowing?" said he, after a long silence between them.

"Never, I swear!" said the other, solemnly.

"Then, some other is the fortunate man, that's all. How good if it should turn out to be Jekyl!" And he laughed heartily at the absurdity of the conceit.

"No more of this," said Onslow, passionately. "The tone of the society we live in here would seem to warrant any, or every imputation, even on those whose lives are spotless; and I know of no greater degradation than the facility of our belief in them. In this instance, however, my conscience is at ease; and I reject, with contempt, the possibility of a stain upon that girl's honour."

"The sentiment does more credit to your chivalry than your shrewdness, George," said the Viscount, sarcastically. "But, as you are about to stake your life on the issue, I cannot impugn your sincerity."

A hasty movement of George towards the window here alarmed Grounsell, and he noiselessly withdrew, and descended the stairs again.

"A precious mess of trouble do I find ready for me," muttered he, as he passed across the court-yard. "Debt, duelling, and sickness, — such are the pleasures that welcome me; and these not the worst, perhaps, if the causes of them were to be made known!"

"My Lady has just heard of your arrival, Doctor, and begs you will have the kindness to step up to her room," said Proctor, coming to meet him.

"I'm tired — I'm fatigued. Say I'm in bed," said Grounsell, angrily.

"Her maid has just seen you, Sir," suggested Proctor, mildly.

"No matter; give the answer I tell you — or, stay — perhaps it would be better to see her. Yes, Proctor, show me the way." And muttering to himself, "The meeting will not be a whit pleasanter for *her* than *me*," he followed the servant up the stairs.

Well habituated to Lady Hester's extravagant and

costly tastes, Grounsell was yet unprepared for the gorgeous decorations and splendid ornaments of the chambers through which he passed, and he stopped from time to time, in amazement, to contemplate a magnificence which was probably rather heightened than diminished by the uncertain light of the candles the servant carried. He peered at the china vases; he passed his hand across the malachite and jasper tables; he narrowly inspected the rich mosaics, as though doubtful of their being genuine; and then, with a deep sigh — almost deep enough to be a groan — he moved on in sadness. A bust of Kate Dalton, the work of a great sculptor, and an admirable likeness, caught his eye, and he gazed at it with signs of strong emotion. There was much beauty in it, and of a character all her own; but still the cold marble had caught up, in traits sterner than those of life, the ambitious bearing of the head, and the proud elevation of the brow.

"And she has become this already!" said he, half aloud. "Oh, how unlike poor Nelly's model! — how different from the simple and beauteous innocence of those saint-like features!"

"My Lady will see you, Sir," said Celestine, breaking in upon his musings. And he followed her into the chamber, where, seated in a deeply-cushioned chair, Lady Hester reclined, dressed in all the perfection of an elegant *déshabillé*.

Grounsell was, assuredly, not the man to be most taken by such attractions; yet he could not remain entirely insensible to them; and he felt a most awkward sense of admiration as he surveyed her. With all a woman's quickness, her Ladyship saw the effect she

had produced, and languidly extending her hand, she vouchsafed the nearest approach to a smile with which she had ever favoured him. As if suddenly recalling all his old antipathies and prejudices, Grounsell was himself in a moment, and, scarcely touching the taper and jewelled fingers, he bowed ceremoniously, and took his seat at a little distance off.

"This is a very unexpected pleasure indeed," sighed Lady Hester; "you only arrived to-night?"

"Half an hour ago, Madam; and but for your Ladyship's summons I should have been in bed."

"How do you find Sir Stafford looking — poorly, I fear?"

"I hav'n't yet seen him, Madam, but I am prepared for a great change."

"I fear so," sighed she, plaintively; "George says, quite a break-up, and Buccellini calls it 'Gotta Affievolita,' and says it is very fatal with elderly people."

"The vulgar phrase of a 'broken heart' is more expressive, Madam, and perhaps quite as pathological."

Lady Hester drew proudly up, and seemed preparing herself for a coming encounter. They were old antagonists, and well knew each other's mode of attack. On the present occasion, however, Grounsell did not seek a contest, and was satisfied by a single shot at the enemy, as if trying the range of his gun.

"You will probably advise a change of air and scene, Doctor Grounsell," said she, calmly, and as though inviting pacific intercourse.

"It is precisely what I have come for, Madam," answered he, in a short, dry voice. "Sir Stafford's affairs require his immediate return to England. The

vicissitudes that attend on great commercial enterprises threaten him with large — very large losses."

Lady Hester fell back in her chair, and this time, at least, her pale cheek and her powerless attitude were not feigned nor counterfeited; but Grounsell merely handed her a smelling-bottle from the table, and went on:

"The exact extent of his liabilities cannot be ascertained at once, but they must be considerable. He will be fortunate if there remain to him one-fourth of his property."

Lady Hester's head fell heavily back, and she fainted away.

The Doctor rose, and sprinkled her forehead with water, and then patiently sat down with his finger on her wrist to watch the returning tide of circulation. Assured at length of her restored consciousness, he went on:

"A small establishment, strict economy, a watchful supervision of every domestic arrangement, together with the proceeds of the sale of all the useless trumpery by which he is at present surrounded, will do much; but he must be seconded, Madam — seconded and aided, not thwarted and opposed. George can exchange into a regiment in India; the proper steps have been already taken for that purpose."

"Have you been thoughtful enough, Sir, in your general care of this family, to engage a small house for us at Brighton?"

"I have seen one at Ramsgate, Madam," replied he, dryly; "but the rent is more than we ought to give."

"Are *we* so very poor as that, Sir?" said she, sarcastically, laying emphasis on the pronoun.

"Many excellent and worthy persons, Madam, contrive to live respectably on less."

"Is Miss Onslow to go out as a governess, Doctor? I am afraid you have forgotten her share in these transactions?"

"I have a letter from her in my pocket, Madam, would show, that she herself is not guilty of this forgetfulness, wherein she makes the very proposition you allude to."

"And *me?* Have you no sphere of self-denial and duty — have you no degrading station, nor menial servitude, adapted to *my* habits?"

"I know of none, Madam," said Grounsell, sternly. "Varnish will no more make a picture, than fine manners prove a substitute for skill or industry."

"This is really too much, Sir," said she, rising, her face now crimson with anger; "and even if all you have said prove true, reverse of fortune can bring no heavier infliction than the prospect of *your* intimacy and obtrusive counsels."

"You may not need them, Madam. In adversity," said Grounsell, with a smile, "healthy stomachs get on very well without bitters." And so saying, he bowed and left the room.

For a few moments Lady Hester sat overwhelmed by the tidings she had just heard, and then, suddenly rising, she rung the bell for her maid.

"Send Miss Dalton to me, Celestine; say I wish to speak to her immediately," said she. "This may be the last time we shall speak to each other ere we invert our positions," muttered she to herself. And in the working of her features might be read all the agony of the reflection.

CHAPTER XVI.

"Pratolino."

How like the great world is every little section of it! How full of all its passions and interests, its warring jealousies, and its selfish struggles! Within the Mazzarini Palace, that night, were at work every emotion and sentiment which sway the wide communities of men; and Hope and Fear, the yearnings of Ambition, and the gloomy forebodings of Despair, sat beside the pillows of those who, in vain, sought sleep and forgetfulness!

Before that long night ended, Sir Stafford had learned his ruin — for it was little less. Kate had yielded, to the pressing entreaties of Lady Hester, her consent to accept Midchikoff; and, just as day was breaking, George Onslow stole to his father's bedside, to see him once more — perhaps for the last time! It would be difficult to say in which of those three hearts the darkest sorrow brooded! With noiseless step, and cautious gesture, George crossed the little sitting-room, and entered his father's chamber; and, without awaking the servant, who kept watch habitually without, but now had dropped off to sleep, he gained the bedside, and sat down.

The terrible tidings he had just heard were evidently working on Sir Stafford's brain, and, despite all the influence of his opiate, still engaged his faculties; for his lips continued to move rapidly, and

short broken sentences fell from him incessantly. "Poor George! poor George!" he muttered from time to time, and the tears rolled down the young man's cheek as he heard them.

"How unworthy of him have I been!" thought he; "how shamefully unworthy and forgetful! Here should have been my place, for those hours which I have spent in noisy dissipation and debauch; and now I come for the first time, and probably the last! Oh, my poor father! how will you bear up against the shock that is preparing for you? — for, with all my faults, I know how you have loved me." A heavy tear dropped from him on the old man's cheek as he said this, and gently brushing it off with his hand, Sir Stafford opened his eyes and awoke. A mild and gentle smile broke over his features as he saw his son beside him, and he drew him towards him, and kissed him.

"Have you been long here, George?" said he, affectionately.

"But a few minutes. I am so sorry to have disturbed you," muttered the other, in confusion.

"Have you seen Grounsell yet? Has he told you?" asked Sir Stafford.

"Grounsell? — no, Sir. I did not even hear of his arrival. What are his tidings?"

"The saddest, perhaps, one friend can bring another," sighed Onslow, as he covered his eyes with his hand. "Nay, nay — I am wrong," said he, rapidly. "So long as Sydney and yourself are spared to me, I have no right to say this; still, George, it is a terrible blow that strikes a man down from affluence to poverty, and, in place of wealth and

power, leaves him nothing but insignificance and ruin!"

"Good Heavens, father! is your brain wandering? What fancies are these that are flitting across your mind?"

"Sad and stern truths, my poor boy," replied the old man, grasping his son's hand in his fevered palm. "A few weeks more will see the great House of Onslow bankrupt. These things cannot be told too briefly, George," said he, speaking with a tremulous and eager rapidity. "One should hear misfortune early, to gain more time for future measures. A great crash has fallen upon the monied interest of England. The vast speculations in railways have overreached themselves; failures of great houses abroad have added to the difficulty. The correspondents whose solvency we never doubted are tottering to ruin. Every post brings tidings of some new failure; and from Odessa, from Hamburg, and from the ports of the Baltic, to the distant shores of the New World, there is nothing but bankruptcy."

"But you have large estates, Sir; you possess property of various kinds beyond the reach of these casualties."

"I own nothing to which my creditors have not a just right, nor, if I did, could I exercise the privilege of retaining it, George," said the old man. "From what Grounsell tells me, there will be sufficient to meet every claim, but no more. There will remain nothing after! Lady Hester's settlement will, of course, secure to her a moderate competence; and we — you and I — must look about, and see how we can face this same world we have been feasting so

long. My time in it will needs be brief; but you, who may look forward with hope to long years of life, must bethink you at once of the new path before you. Arouse yourself, then, to the task, and I do not know but I may be prouder of you, yet, buffeting the wild waves of adversity, and fighting the manful part of a bold, courageous spirit, than I have ever been, in seeing you in the brilliant circle of all your high and titled acquaintances. Ay, George, the English merchant never died out in my heart, for all the aristocratic leaven which accident mixed up with my fortunes. I never ceased to glory in the pride of wealth accumulated by generous enterprises and honourable toil. I loved the life of labour that disciplined the faculties, and exercised not alone intelligence, but turned to use the gentler charities of life, linking man to man, as brethren journeying the same road, with different burdens, perhaps, but with the same goal. For myself, therefore, I have few cares. It remains with you to make them even fewer."

"Tell me what you propose for me, Sir," said George, in a low, weak voice.

"First of all, George, you ought to leave the army. Grounsell, I must tell you, is not of this opinion; he advises an exchange into a regiment in India, but I think differently. To repair, if it be possible, the shattered wreck of our fortunes, you must address yourself to business life and habits. You'll have to visit the West Indies, and, probably, the East. We still possess property in Ceylon of value; and our coffee plantations there, as yet only in their infancy, need nothing but good management to insure success. Grounsell laughed at my suggesting you for such duties, but I

know you better, George, far better than *he* does. The English pluck that storms a breach or heads a charge is the very same quality that sustains a man on the long dark road of adverse fortune. I have often told Grounsell that the stuff was in you, George."

The young man squeezed his father's hand, but was obliged to turn away his head to hide the tears which filled his eyes; for what a terrible deception was he practising at that very moment, and what duplicity was there even in the silence with which he heard him!

For a few seconds Sir Stafford seemed to revel in all the bright visions of a warm fancy. The prospect his imagination had conjured up appeared to have momentarily lifted him above the reach of sorrow. He thought of his son engaged in the active business of life, and displaying in this new career the energies and resources of a bold and courageous spirit. He imagined the high-principled youth becoming the British merchant, and making the name of "Onslow" great and respected in the old arena of all their victories — the City of London. Could this but come to pass, — were this dream to be realised, and he would bless the hour that wrecked his fortune, and thus made his poverty the foundation of future greatness.

"I confess, George," said he, "that I have a pride in thinking that I knew you better than others did, and that I read in the very wayward caprices of your disposition the impatience of an active mind, and not the *ennui* of an indolent one." From this the old man branched off into his plans for the future; and, as if the emergency had suggested energy, talked well and clearly of all that was to be done. They were to start

for England at once. Sir Stafford felt as if he were able to set out that very day. Some weeks would elapse before the crash came, and in the interval every preparation might be taken. "I hope," said he, feelingly, "that I have few enemies; I am not sanguine enough to say, none; but such as they are, they will not seek to humiliate me, I trust, by any unnecessary publicity." The theme was a very painful one, and for a few seconds he could not go on. At last he resumed: "The extravagance of this household, George, will give much and just offence. It must be retrenched, and from this very day, from this very hour. You will look to this. It must not be said of us that, with ruin before us, we continued these habits of wasteful excess. Let these troops of idle servants be discharged at once. Except Lady Hester's carriage, sell off all equipage. Take no heed of what will be the town talk; such a downfal as ours can never be kept a secret. Let us only take care that we fall with dignity. Grounsell will remain here after us to settle everything, and our departure ought to be as speedy as may be. But you are not listening, George; do you hear me?"

It was quite true George heeded little of what his father spoke; for, with bent down head, he was trying to catch the sounds of what seemed a long low whistle from the court without. As he listened, the whistle was repeated; he knew now that it was Norwood's signal, and that "his time was up."

"I must leave you, my dear father," said he, assuming all that he could of calmness. "I have an appointment this morning, and one that I cannot well

shake off. Norwood and I have promised to meet some friends at Pratolino."

"It was of that same Norwood I wished to speak to you, George. The sophistry of thinking him 'no worse than his set' will serve no longer. Such men are not fitting acquaintances for one whose character must be above reproach. Norwood is a most unworthy friend for you."

"I scarcely ever thought of him in that light. We are intimate, it is true; but such intimacy is not friendship."

"The greater the pollution of such acquaintanceship, then," said the old man, gravely. "To see the dark side of such a nature, and yet live under its baneful shadow, is infinitely worse, George, than all the self-deception of a rash confidence. Keep your promise to-day, but I beseech you let it be for the last time in such company."

Again the whistle was heard, and with it the sharp crack of a whip, denoting impatience; and fearful that some accident might betray his secret, George clasped the old man's hand fervidly within his own, and hurried away without a word.

"Is that George?" cried Norwood, as he stood beside a calessino ready harnessed, and with lamps lighted, for the morning was still dark. "Is that George? Why, where have you been loitering this half-hour, man? Our time is six sharp, and it is now considerably past five, and the way lies all up hill."

"I have often done the distance in half an hour," said George, angrily.

"Perhaps the errand was a pleasanter one," re-

joined Norwood, laughing; "but jump in, for I feel certain the others are before us."

George Onslow was in no mood for talking as he took his seat beside his companion; the late scene with his father and the approaching event were enough to occupy him, even had his feeling for Norwood been different from what it was, but in reality never had he experienced the same dislike for the Viscount. All the flippant ease, all the cool indifference he displayed, were only so many offences to one whose thoughts were traversing the whole current of his life, from earliest boyhood down to that very moment. A few hours hence he might be no more! And thence arose to his mind the judgments men would pass upon him, the few who would speak charitably, the still fewer who would regret him. What a career, thought he — what use to have made of fortune, station, health and vigour — to have lived in dissipation, and die for a street brawl! And poor Kate! to what unfeeling scandal will this unhappy meeting expose *you;* how impossible to expect that truth will ever penetrate through that dark atmosphere of mystery and malevolence the world will throw over the event.

Norwood was provoked at the silence, and tried in various ways to break it. He spoke of the road, the weather, the horse's trotting action, the scenery — over which the breaking day now threw fitful and uncertain lights — but all in vain; and, at last, piqued by non-success, he spitefully pointed attention to a little valley beside the road, and said, "Do you see that spot yonder, near the pine-trees — that 's where Harry Mathews was shot. Malzahn sent the bullet through the brain at forty paces. They were both

first-rate pistol-shots, and the only question was, who should fire first. Harry determined to reserve his shot, and he carried the privilege into the other world with him. Malzahn knew he might trust his skill, and fired the very instant he took his ground. The moral of which is — always try and have first fire with a foreigner."

"I hear the sound of wheels behind us; who are they?" said George, not heeding either the story or the counsel.

"The doctor, I suspect. I ordered a calessino to wait for him at the door of the palace, and bring him up as fast as possible."

"If Guilmard be equal to his reputation, we shall not want his services," said Onslow, with a faint smile.

"Who can tell? We 'll put you up at a short distance, and there 's nothing shakes the nerve of your practised pistol-shot more than ten or twelve paces."

The road here became so steep that they were obliged to get down and walk for some distance, while the horse toiled slowly up behind them. As they went, Norwood continued to talk on incessantly of this, that, and t'other, as though bound to occupy the attention of his companion, while George, with half-closed eyes, strolled onward, deep in his own thoughts.

"We 're not far off the place now, George," said Norwood at last, "and I wish you 'd throw off that look of care and abstraction. These foreign fellows will be quite ready to misinterpret it. Seem at your ease, man, and take the thing as I 've seen you take it before — as rather good fun than otherwise."

"But that is precisely what I do not feel it," said

George, smiling quietly. "Twenty-four hours ago, when life had every possible advantage to bestow on me, with the prospect of an ample fortune before me, I was perfectly ready to turn out with any man who had the right to ask me; and now that I am ruined —"

"Ruined!" broke in Norwood; "what do you mean? You have not lost to that Greek fellow so largely as that?"

"Now that my father is on the verge of utter ruin," repeated George, slowly — "the news came last night — I never felt the desire of life so strong within me. A few days or weeks more will make it public gossip, so I may tell you, that we have not escaped the torrent that is sweeping away so many of the richest houses in Europe; and what between our immense liabilities and my father's scrupulous sense of honour, the chances are we shall be utterly beggared."

"The devil!" exclaimed Norwood, whose thoughts at once reverted to his own claims on George, and the unpaid acceptances he still held of his.

"That's what I feel so strange," said George, now speaking with a degree of warmth and interest, "that it should be exactly when life ceases to give promise, that I should care for it; and I own to you, I'd give anything that this meeting was not before me."

Norwood started, and turned his keen eyes on the other, but in the calm, unmoved features, he saw no traces of fear or even agitation; and it was in his habitually calm voice Onslow resumed:

"Yes, I wish the Count's hand would shake a little, Norwood. I'd be most grateful to the bullet that would take to the right or the left of me."

"Come, come, George, no more of this. We are alone here, it's true; but if you talk this way now, you may chance to look like it, by-and-by."

"And if I do not my looks will strangely belie my sentiments, that I can tell you," said Onslow, with a quiet laugh. "I don't care how you read the confession, Norwood, but I tell you frankly, that if the insult in this instance admitted of an apology — if there were any way to come off consistent with honour — I'd take it and not fight this Frenchman."

"Have you forgotten his reputation as a shot?" asked Norwood, hastily.

"I was not thinking of it. My mind was dwelling merely on myself and my own interests. How far my life, if preserved, could be rendered useful to others, and in what way my death might occasion detriment and injury."

"A most mercantile estimate of profit and loss, by Jove!" said Norwood, laughing; "and perhaps it is fortunate for you there is no 'amende' possible, for if Guilmard should miss you —"

"As to these acceptances," said George, not paying attention to what the other said, "I'd prefer that they should not be presented to my father under our actual circumstances. My horses and carriages, and some other trumpery of mine, when sold, will more than meet them, and I have given orders to that end."

"Come, old fellow, it's not gone that far yet," said Norwood, affecting a tone of friendship, suggested by the self-satisfaction the promise of payment afforded him. "But hush! There they are, all together. Let us talk no more of these matters; and now, George, for Heaven's sake be cool."

Norwood drew the other's arm within his own as he said this, and advanced to where a group of some half-dozen persons were standing, beside a low balcony, overlooking the Val d'Arno and the graceful valley in which Florence stands. Norwood quitted his friend's arm as he came forward and saluted the company. Nothing could possibly be more easy and unconstrained than the tone of their conversation, as they chatted away about the prospect beneath, and over which, like a gauzy veil, the grey shadow of dawn was hanging. With the exception of an Italian or two, they were all French — the young fashionables who were the loungers of the *salons* and *cafés* of the city.

"Have you breakfasted, my Lord," said one. "If not, let me recommend some excellent cutlets, which are not too cold, even yet."

"And the best chocolate I ever tasted out of Paris," cried another.

"Thanks," said Norwood. "We 'll profit by the good counsel." And, taking a cigar from his case, he lighted it from Guilmard's, as, with hands in his paletot, he sat negligently on the wall, surveying the scene below him.

"Come, George, let 's have something," whispered Norwood, eagerly, for the vacant and unoccupied stare of Onslow continued to cause the Viscount the most intense anxiety. "These fellows are affecting to be devilish cool. Let us not be behindhand." And, rather by force than mere persuasion, he dragged Onslow along, and entered the little parlour of the inn.

A large table, covered with the remains of an ample breakfast, stood in the middle of the room, and

a dish of cutlets was placed to keep hot before the stove. Several loose sheets of paper lay scattered about the table, on which were scrawled absurd and ill-drawn caricatures of duels, in which attitudes of extravagant fear and terror predominated. Norwood glanced at them for a moment, and then contemptuously threw them into the fire.

"Sit down, George," said he, placing a chair for the other; "and, if you cannot eat, at least take a 'nip' of brandy. Jekyl will be up, I suppose, in a few minutes. I told him to come with the doctor."

"I never felt an appetite at this early hour," said Onslow; "and perhaps the present is not the time to suggest one."

"Did you remark Guilmard?" said Norwood, as he helped himself to a cutlet, and prepared his plate most artistically for a savoury meal. "Did you observe him, George?"

"No; I never looked that way."

"By Jove! he has got a tremendous scar on his cheek. The whole length, from the eye to the corner of his mouth. English knuckles do not certainly improve French physiognomy. A left-hander, eh?"

"I remember nothing about it," said Onslow, carelessly.

"Well, you 've left him a memorandum of the transaction, any way," said the Viscount, as he ate on. "And you were talking about an apology a while ago?"

"I was wishing that the case admitted of one," said Onslow, calmly.

Norwood gave a sidelong glance at the speaker,

and, although he said nothing, a gesture of angry impatience revealed what was passing within him.

"Do try that brandy. Well, then, take a glass of Curaçoa," said he, pushing the bottle towards him.

"Something! anything, in fact, you would say, Norwood, that might serve to make my courage 'carry the bead;' but you are altogether mistaken in me. It is not of myself I am thinking; my anxieties are — but what could you care, or even understand about my motives. Finish your breakfast, and let us make an end of this affair."

"In one minute more I 'm your man, but if I have a weakness, it is for a plain roast truffle, with butter. It was a first love of mine, and as the adage says, 'On y revient toujours.' Were I in your shoes, this morning, George, I 'd not leave one on the dish."

"On what principle, pray," asked Onslow, smiling.

"On that of the old Cardinal, who, when his doctors pronounced his case hopeless, immediately ordered a supper of ortolans with olives. It was a grand opportunity to indulge without the terror of an indigestion; and *à propos* to such themes, where can our worthy doctor be all this time? The calessino was close up with us all the way."

Leaving Norwood to continue his meal, George strolled out in quest of the surgeon, but none had seen nor knew anything of him. An empty calessino was standing on the road-side, but the driver only knew that the gentleman who came with him had got out there, and entered the park.

"Then we shall find him near the little lake," said

Norwood, coolly, as George returned, disappointed. "But it 's strange, too, that he should be alone. Jekyl was to have been with him. These foreigners ever insist upon two seconds on either side. Like the gambler that always is calling for fresh cards, it looks very like a suspicion of foul play. Go back, George, and see if the fellow knows nothing of Jekyl. You 've only to name him, for every cab, cad, and barcaruolo of Florence is acquainted with Master Albert."

George returned to the spot, but without any success. The man stated that he took his stand, as he was desired, at the gate of the palace, and that a little man, apparently somewhat elderly, came out, and asked which way the others had gone, and how long before they had started. "See that you pick them up, then," said he, "but don't pass them. He talked incessantly," added the man, "the whole way, but in such bad Italian that I could make nothing of it, and so I answered at random. If I were tired of *him*, I fancy he was sick of *me;* and when he got out yonder, and passed into the park, it was a relief to us both."

George was just turning away, when his eye caught a glimpse of the glorious landscape beneath, on which a freshly risen sun was shedding all its splendour. There are few scenes, even in Italy, more striking than the Val d'Arno around Florence. The beautiful city itself, capped with many a dome and tower, the gigantic castle of the Bargello, the graceful arch of the Baptistery, the massive façade of the Pitti, all, even to the lone tower on the hill where Galileo watched, rich in their storied memories; while on the

gentle slope of the mountain stood hundreds of beauteous villas, whose very names are like spells to the imagination, and the Dante, the Alfieri, the Boccaccio, vie in interest with the sterner realities of the Medici, the Pazzi, the Salviati, and the Strozzi. What a flood of memory pours over the mind, to think how every orange-grove and terrace, how each clump of olives, or each alley of cedars, have witnessed the most intense passions, or the most glorious triumphs of man's intellect or ambition, and that every spot we see has its own claim to immortality.

Not in such a mood as this, however, did Onslow survey the scene. It was in the rapt admiration of its picturesque beauty. The glittering river, now seen and lost again, the waving tree tops, the parterres of bright flowers, the stately palaces, whose terraces were shadowed by the magnolia, the oleander, and the fig, all made up a picture of rich and beautiful effect, and he longed to throw himself on the deep grass, and gaze on it for hours. As he stood thus, unable to tear himself away, he heard the sharp cracking of a postilion's whip immediately beneath him, and, on looking down, saw two heavily laden travelling-carriages, which all the power of eight horses to each could barely drag along against the steep ascent. A mounted courier in advance proclaimed that the travellers were persons of condition, and everything about the equipages themselves indicated wealth and station. As Onslow knew all who moved in a certain class in society, he was curious to see who was journeying northward so early in the year, and, stepping into a little copse beside the road, he waited for the carriages to pass.

They came slowly forward, now, halting to "breathe" the weary horses, now, struggling for a brief space against the hill, and at last, turning a sharp angle of the way, the first carriage drew short up, directly in front of where he stood. The panels bore the flaunting and pretentious arms of Prince Midchikoff, with many an armorial emblem, which, however tolerated in the rest of Europe, the Czar would not suffer within his own dominions. As George glanced at these, he started, for a well-known voice caught his ear, and, forgetting his desire of concealment, he leaned forward to listen. It was Kate was speaking; he could not hear the words, but the accents were her own. Oh, for one look at her — for the last time! thought he; and dashed headlong through the copse towards where, by another bend, the road made a rapid turn upwards.

Already the horses had regained their wind, and were away at a brisk trot, as George tore onward through the closely interwoven branches and thick underwood of the grove. There was no path, nor, once out of sight or sound of the road, anything to guide him; but he dashed on, in the direction he supposed the carriage must take. At every step the way grew more intricate and difficult; the pits the peasants dig for chestnut leaves, the little heaps collected for firewood, intercepted him at each moment. With torn clothes and bleeding hands, he still rushed madly, resolutely bent upon his object; and with many a bruise, and many a scar, at last gained the open country, just in time to see the second carriage crowning the peak of the mountain above his head; while he could hear the sharp, clanking

sound of the drag as they fastened it to the leading carriage. Any attempt to overtake them on the hill must now be hopeless. He well knew the pace at which a Continental postilion descends a mountain, and how the steepest galleries of Alps and Appennines are often galloped down at speed. For miles below him he could see the winding zigzags of the road, and at each turning he fancied how he might catch sight of her. The mountain itself was terraced with vineyards, from base to summit; but from the steepness of its side, these terraces were but narrow strips of ground, barely sufficient for the vinedresser to pass when tending his plants, or gathering in their produce. To look down on this giant stair — for such it seemed — was a giddy sensation, and few could have surveyed the precipitous descent without a sense of danger. Onslow's thoughts, however, had but one object — to see Kate once, and for the last time. By a straight descent of the mountain, leaping from terrace to terrace, it was possible for him to reach the bottom before the carriages could traverse the winding course of the road; and no sooner was the thought conceived, than he proceeded to execute it. It is difficult to convey to those who have never seen these terraced flights of earth a true notion of the peril of such an undertaking; but they who have beheld them will acknowledge that little short of utter recklessness could dare it. Less leaping than dropping from height to height, the slightest impulse will carry the footsteps beyond the edge of the terrace, and then all self-control is lost, and destruction, to every appearance, inevitable.

The youth, whose nerves have been trained by the

sports of fox-hunting and deer-stalking, however, is seldom unprepared for sudden danger; and George never hesitated, when once the undertaking seemed practicable. By sidelong leaps he descended the first three or four terraces well and safely. Impressed with the risk of the exploit, he never turned his eyes from the spot whereon he meant to alight, and measured every bound with accuracy. Suddenly, however, his attention was caught by the postilion's bugle sounding, several hundred feet below him, and, in a bend of the road, he saw the dust left by the fast-descending carriage. Forgetful of safety — of everything, save his object — he leaped at random, and with a tremendous bound cleared one terrace completely, and alighted on the one beneath it. The impulse drove him forwards, and ere he could recover, he was on the very verge of the cliff. Even yet his presence of mind might have rescued him, when the loose masonry gave way, and carried him down with it. He fell forwards, and headlong; the force of the descent carried him on, and now, half-falling, half-struggling, he bounded from height to height, till, shattered, maimed, and bleeding, he rolled, an unconscious heap of clay, in the long grass of the valley.

Not fifty yards from where he lay, the carriages passed, and Kate even leaned from the window to gaze upon the winding glen, little thinking how terrible an interest that quiet scene was filled with. And so the equipages held their speed, and pressed onwards; while, with a faint breathing, poor George lay, sleeping that dreamless slumber that seems a counterfeit of Death.

CHAPTER XVII.

A Morning of Misadventures.

"Well, my Lord, are we to pass the day here," said Count Trouville, the second of the opposite party, as Norwood returned from a fruitless search of George Onslow, "or are we to understand that this is the English mode of settling such matters?"

"I am perfectly ready, Monsieur le Count, to prove the contrary, so far as my own poor abilities extend," said Norwood, calmly.

"But your friend has disappeared, Sir. You are left alone here."

"Which is, perhaps, the reason of your having dared to insult me," rejoined the other, "that being, perhaps, the French custom in such affairs."

"Come, come, gentlemen," interposed an old cavalry officer, who acted as second friend to Guilmard, "you must both see that all discussion of this kind is irregular and unseemly. We have come here this morning for one specific purpose — to obtain reparation for a great injury. The gentleman who should have offered us the amende has suddenly withdrawn himself. I offer no opinion on the fact that he came out accompanied by only one friend; we might, perhaps, have devised means to obviate this difficulty. For his own absence we have no remedy. I would therefore ask what you have to propose to us in this emergency?"

"A little patience — nothing more. My friend must have lost his way; some accident or other has detained him, and I expect to see him here every instant."

"Shall we say half an hour longer, my Lord?" rejoined the other, taking out his watch. "That will bring us to eight o'clock."

"Which, considering that our time was named, 'sharp six,'" interposed Trouville, "is a very reasonable 'grace.'"

"Your expression is an impertinence, Monsieur," said Norwood, fiercely.

"And yet I don't intend to apologise for it," said the other, smiling.

"I'm glad of it, Sir. It's the only thing you have said to-day with either good sense or spirit."

"Enough, quite enough, my Lord," replied the Frenchman gaily. "Dans la bonne société, on ne dit jamais de trop. Where shall it be, and when?"

"Here, and now," said Norwood, "if I can only find any one who will act for me."

"Pray, my Lord, don't go in search of him," said Trouville, "or we shall despair of seeing you here again."

"I will give a bail for my re-appearance, Sir, that you cannot doubt of," cried Norwood, advancing towards the other with his cane elevated.

A perfect burst of horror broke from the Frenchmen at this threat, and three or four immediately threw themselves between the contending parties.

"But for this, my Lord," said the old officer, "I should have offered you my services."

"And I should have declined them, Sir," said

Norwood, promptly. "The first peasant I meet with will suffice;" and, so saying, he hurried from the spot, his heart almost bursting with passion. With many a malediction of George — with curses deep and cutting on every one whose misconduct had served to place him in his present position — he took his way towards the high road.

"What could have happened?" muttered he; "what confounded fit of poltroonery has seized him? a fellow that never wanted pluck in his life! Is it possible that he can have failed now? And this to occur at the very moment they are beggared! Had they been rich, as they were a few months back, I 'd have made the thing pay. Ay, by Jove! I 'd have 'coined my blood,' as the fellow says in the play, and written a swinging cheque with red ink! And now I have a bad quarrel, and nothing to come of it! and so to walk the high roads in search of some one who can load a pistol!"

A stray peasant or two, jogging along to Florence — a postilion with return horses — a shabbily-dressed curate, or a friar with a sack behind him, were all that he saw for miles of distance, and he returned once more to interrogate the calessino driver as to the stranger who accompanied him from the city.

Any one whose misfortune it may have been to make inquiries from an Italian Vetturino of any fact, no matter how insignificant or unimportant, will sympathise with Norwood's impatience at the evasive and distrustful replies that now met his questions. Although the fact could have no possible concern or interest for him, he prevaricated and contradicted himself half a dozen times over, as to the stranger's age,

country, and appearance, so that, utterly baffled and provoked, the Viscount turned away and entered the Park.

"I, too, shall be reported missing, I suppose," said he, bitterly, as he walked along a little path that skirted a piece of ornamental water. "By Jupiter! this is a pleasant morning's work, and must have its reparation one day or other."

A hearty sneeze suddenly startled him as he spoke; he turned hastily about, but could see no one, and yet his hearing was not to be deceived! He searched the spot eagerly, he examined the little boat-shed — the copse — the underwood — everything, in fact, but not a trace of living being was to be seen; at last, a slight rustling sound seemed to issue from a piece of rustic shellwork, representing a river god reclining on his urn, and, on approaching, he distinctly detected the glitter of a pair of eyes within the sockets of the figure.

"Here goes for a brace of balls into him," cried Norwood, adjusting a cap on his pistol. "A piece of stonework that sneezes is far too like a man to be trusted."

Scarcely was the threat uttered, when a tremulous scream issued from within, and a voice, broken with terror called out,

"D — don't fire, my Lord. You 'll m — m — murder me. I 'm Purvis — Sc — Sc — Scroope Purvis."

"How did you come to be there, then?" asked Norwood, half angrily.

"I 'll tell you when I g — get out!" was the answer; and he disappeared from the loophole at which

he carried on the conversation for some seconds. Norwood began to fancy that the whole was some mystification of his brain, for no trace of him was to be had, when he emerged from the boat-house with his hat stripped of the brim, and his clothes in tatters, his scratched face and hands attesting that his transit had not been of the easiest. "It 's like a r — r — rat-hole," cried he, puffing for breath.

"And what the devil brought you there?" asked Norwood, rudely.

"I ca — came out to see the fight!" cried he; "and when you 're inside there you have a view of the whole Park, and are quite safe, too."

"Then it was you who drove out in the calessino meant for the doctor?" said Norwood, with the air of a man who would not brook an equivocation.

"Yes; that was a d — d — dodge of mine to get out here," said he, chuckling.

"Well, Master Purvis," said Norwood, drawing his arm within his own, "if you can't be the doctor, you shall at least be the 'Second.' This is a dodge of mine; so come along, and no more about it."

"But I ca — can't; I never was — I never could be a se — se — second."

"You shall begin to-day, then, or my name 's not Norwood. You 've been the cause of a whole series of mishaps and misfortunes; and, by Jove! if the penalty were a heavier one, you should pay it."

"I tell you, I n — never saw a duel; I — I never f — fought one; I never will fight one; I don't even know how they g — go about it."

"You shall learn, Sir; that 's all," said Norwood, as he hastened along, dragging the miserable Purvis

at his side. "But for you, Sir," continued he, in a voice thick with passion, — "but for you, Sir, and your inveterate taste for pimping into what does not concern you, we should have experienced no delay nor disappointment this morning. The consequences are that I shall have to stand where another ought to have stood, and take to myself a quarrel in which I have had no share."

"H — how is that? Do — do — do tell me all about it!" cried Purvis, eagerly.

"I 'll tell you nothing, Sir; not a syllable. Your personal adventures on this morning must be the subject of your revelations when you get back to Florence, if ever you do get back."

"Why, I — I 'm — I 'm not going to fight anybody!" exclaimed he, in terror.

"No, Sir, but *I* am; and, in the event of any disastrous incident, *your* position may be unpleasant. If Trouville falls, you 'll have to make for Lombardy, and cross over into Switzerland; if he shoots me, you can take my passport, it is *visé* for the Tyrol. As they know me at Inspruck, you 'd better keep to the south'ard — some of the smaller places about Botzen, or Brixen."

"But I don't know Bo — Bo — Botzen on the map! and I don't see why I 'm to sk — sk — skulk about the Continent like a refu — refu — refugee Pole!"

"Take your own time, then; and, perhaps, ten years in a fortress may make you wiser. It 's no affair of mine, you know; and I merely gave you the advice, as I 'm a little more up to these things than you are."

"But, supposing that I 'll have no — nothing to

do with the matter — that I 'll not be present — that I refuse to see —"

"You shall and you must, Sir; and if I hear another word of objection out of your mouth, or if you expose me, by any show of your own poltroonery, to the ribald insolence of these Frenchmen, by Heaven! I 'll hold your hand in my own when I fire at Count Trouville."

"And I may be mu — mu — murdered!" screamed Purvis. "An innocent man's bl — blood shed, all for nothing!"

"Bluebeard treated his wives to the same penalty for the same crime, Master Purvis. And now listen to me, Sir, and mark well my words. With the causes which have led to this affair you have no concern whatever; your only business here is in the capacity of my second. Be present when the pistols are loaded; stand by as they step the ground; and, if you can do no more, try at least to look as if you were not going to be shot at." Neither the counsel nor the tone it was delivered in were very reassuring; and Purvis went along with his head down and his hands in his pockets, reflecting on all the "accidents by fire-arms" he had read of in the newspapers, together with the more terrible paragraphs about fatal duels, and criminal proceedings against all concerned in them.

The Frenchmen were seated in the garden at a table, and smoking their cigars, as Norwood came up, and, in a few words, explained that a countryman of his own, whom he had met by chance, would undertake the duties of his friend.

"I have only to say, gentlemen," he added, "that he has never even witnessed an affair of this kind;

and I have but to address myself to the loyal good faith of Frenchmen to supply any deficiencies in his knowledge. Mr. Purvis, Messieurs."

The old Colonel having courteously saluted him, took him to a short distance aside, and spoke eagerly for a few minutes, while Norwood, burning with anxiety and uneasiness, tried to smoke his cigar with every semblance of unconcern.

"I 'm sure, if you think so," cried Scroope, aloud, "I'm not the m — man to gainsay the opinion. A miss is as g — g — good as a m — mile; and as he didn't strike him —"

"Tonnerre de Dieu! Sir — strike him!" screamed the old soldier. "Did you say strike him?"

"No, I didn't — I couldn't have meant that," broke in Purvis. "I meant to remark that, as there was no mischief done —"

"And who will venture to say that, Sir?" interposed the other. "Is it nothing that a Frenchman should have been menaced?"

"That 's a gr — great deal — a tremendous deal. It 's as much as beating another man; I know that," muttered poor Purvis, deprecatingly.

"Is this a sneer, Sir?" asked the Colonel, drawing himself up to his full height.

"No, no, it ain't; no, upon my soul I'm quite serious. I never was less disposed for a jest in my life."

"You could never have selected a less opportune moment for one, Sir," rejoined the other, gravely. "Am I to conclude, Sir," resumed he, after a second's interval, "that we have no difference of opinion on this affair?"

"None whatever. I agree with you in everything you have s — said, and everything you in — intend to say."

"Your friend will then apologise?" resumed the Colonel.

"He shall — he must."

"Simply expressing his regret that an unguarded action should have occasioned a misconception, and that in lifting his arm he neither intended the gesture as a menace nor an insult. Isn't that your meaning?"

"Just so; and that if he *had* struck he wouldn't have hurt him."

"Feu d'enfer! Sir, what *are* you saying; or do you mean this for a mockery of us?" screamed the Colonel, in a fit of passion.

"You terrify me so," cried Purvis; "you are so impe — impe — impetuous, I don't know what I'm saying."

The Frenchman measured him with a glance of strange meaning. It was evident that such a character was somewhat new to him, and it required all his skill and acuteness to comprehend it. "Very well, Sir," said he, at last, "I leave the details entirely to yourself; speak to your friend, arrange the matter between you, and let us finish the affair as speedily as may be."

"What is all this delay about?" muttered Norwood, angrily, as the other joined him; "is there any difficulty in stepping twelve or twenty paces?"

"None; but we've hit upon a b — better plan, and you've only to say that you're sorry for it all — that you didn't m — mean anything — and that you never did b — b — beat a Frenchman — nor will you ever do so in future."

"Why, what do you mean?" asked Norwood, in astonishment.

"That we 'll all go back and lunch at the 'Luna;' for there 's no — nothing to fight about."

Norwood pushed by him contemptuously, and, with hurried steps, walked up to where the old Colonel stood. "You are a French officer, Sir," said he, "and I rely upon your honour that, whether from the ignorance or inaptitude of that gentleman, no blame may attach itself to me in this business. I have no apology to offer, nor any amende save one."

"Very well, Sir, we are ready," said the Colonel. "I will ask one of my countrymen to act for you, for I see you are in very indifferent hands."

And now, like men who were well accustomed to the task, they set about the details of the duel, while Purvis, being at full liberty, slipped from the spot, and retired into the wood.

"You 've won the first fire, my Lord," said a young Frenchman to Norwood; "the conditions are twelve paces — back to back — to turn at the word, and fire."

Norwood bowed, and, without speaking, followed the other to the spot where he was to stand. As he waited thus, pistol in hand, he was directly opposite to the place wherein Purvis had taken refuge, and who, seeing Norwood in front of him, with a cocked pistol, and his finger on the trigger, uttered a scream of terror, and fell flat on the ground. Before the rest could discover the cause of the outcry, a shout from outside of the "Police" — the "Gendarmes" — was heard, and Dr. Grounsell rushed into the garden, followed by several dismounted dragoons. In an instant

all were away; Norwood sprang over a low balcony into a vineyard, while in various directions the others scampered off, leaving Purvis alone upon the field.

But too happy to have fallen into the safe keeping of the authorities, Purvis accepted his captivity with a most placid contentment.

"Where's Captain Onslow? Have you seen him, Sir?" whispered Grounsell to him.

"I have seen everybody, but I don't re — remember anything. It's all a dr — dr — dream to me."

"There was no duel? They hadn't fought?" asked Grounsell.

"I — I — I think not; pro — pro — probably not," said Purvis, whose faculties were still very cloudy.

Grounsell turned away from him in disdain, and entered the house. To all his inquiries from the waiters of the inn the answers were vague and insufficient, nor could the Doctor discover either what had occurred, or the reasons of the long delay on the ground. Meanwhile, the "Carabinieri," stimulated by liberal promises of reward, were searching the Park in every quarter, and scouring the country around to arrest the fugitives; and the peasantry, enlisted in the pursuit, hastened hither and thither to aid them. Whether really unable to come up with them, or, as is more probable, concurring in the escape through bribery, the Dragoons returned to the inn, after about an hour's absence, without the capture of a single prisoner.

Grounsell cursed their Italian indolence, and reviled every institution of their lazy land. How he raved about foreign falsehood and rascality, and wished for a London Detective and a Magistrate of Bow-street.

Never did Lord Palmerston so thirst to implant British institutions in a foreign soil, as did he to teach these "Maccaroni rascals what a good Police meant." What honest indignation did he not vent upon all English residents abroad, who, for sake of a mild climate and lax morality, could exchange their native country for the Continent; and at last, fairly worn out with his denunciations, he sat down on a bench, tired and exhausted.

"Will you t — t — tell them to let me go?" cried Purvis. "I 've done nothing. I never do anything. My name is Purvis, Sc — Sc — Scroope Purvis, bro — brother to Mrs. Ricketts, of the Villino Zoe."

"Matters which have no possible interest for *me*, Sir," growled out Grounsell; "nor am I a Corporal of 'Gendarmes,' to give orders for your liberation."

"But they 'll take me to — to prison!" cried Purvis.

"With all my heart, Sir, so that I be not your fellow captive," rejoined the Doctor, angrily, and left the spot, while the Police, taking as many precautions for securing Purvis as though he had been a murderer or a housebreaker, assisted him into a calèche, and, seated one on either side of him, with their carbines unslung, set out for Florence.

"They 'll take me for Fr — Fr — Fra Diavolo, if I enter the city in this fashion," cried Purvis; but certainly his rueful expression might have belied the imputation.

Grounsell sat down upon a grassy bench beside the road, overcome with fatigue and disappointment. From the hour of his arrival in Florence he had not enjoyed one moment of rest. On leaving Lady Hester's chamber he had betaken himself to Sir Staf-

ford's apartment, and there till nigh daybreak had he sat, breaking the sad tidings of ruin to his old friend, and recounting the terrible story of disasters which were to crush him into poverty. Thence he hastened to George Onslow's room; but he was already gone. A few minutes before he had started with Norwood for Pratolino, and all that remained for Grounsell was, to inform the police of the intended meeting, while he himself, wisely suspecting that nothing could go forward in Florence unknown to Jekyl, repaired to that gentleman's residence at once.

Without the ceremony of announcement, Grounsell mounted the stairs, and opened the door of Jekyl's apartment, just as its owner had commenced the preparations for his breakfast. There was an almost Spartan simplicity in the arrangements, which might have made less composed spirits somewhat abashed and ill at ease. The little wooden platter of maccaroni, the small coffee-pot of discoloured hue and dinged proportions, the bread of Æthiopian complexion, and the bunch of shrivelled grapes, offered a meal irreproachable on the score of either costliness or epicurism. But Jekyl, far from feeling disconcerted at their exposure to strangers' eyes, seemed to behold them with sincere satisfaction, and, with a most courteous smile, welcomed the Doctor to Florence, and thanked him for the very polite attention of so early a visit.

"I believe I ought to apologise for the unseasonable hour, Sir," blundered out Grounsell, who was completely thrown off his balance by this excessive urbanity; "but the cause must plead for me."

"Any cause which has conferred the honour on

me is sure of being satisfactory. Pray come nearer to the table. You 'll find that maccaroni eat better than it looks. The old Duke de Montmartre always recommended maccaroni to be served on wood. His maxim was, 'Keep the "plat d'argent" for a mayonnaise or a galantine.'"

"Excuse me if I cannot join you, Sir. Nothing but a matter of extreme importance could warrant my present intrusion. I only reached this city a few hours back, and I find everything at the Mazzarini Palace in a state of discord and confusion. Some are questions for time and consideration; others are more immediately pressing. One of these is this affair of George Onslow's. Who is he about to meet, and for what?"

"His antagonist is a very agreeable young man — quite a gentleman, I assure you — attached to the French mission here, and related to the 'Morignys,' whom you must have met at 'Madame Parivaux's' formerly."

"Never heard of one of them, Sir. But what 's the quarrel?"

"It originated, I believe, in some form of disputation — an altercation," simpered Jekyl, as he sweetened and sipped his coffee.

"A play transaction — a gambling affair, eh?"

"I fancy not; Count Guilmard does not play."

"So far, so good," said Grounsell. "Now, Sir, how is it to be arranged? — what settlement can be effected? I speak to you frankly, perhaps bluntly, Mr. Jekyl, for my nature has few sympathies with courteous ambiguities. Can this business be accommodated without a meeting?"

Jekyl shook his head, and gave a soft, plaintive little sigh.

"Is friendly interference out of the question, Sir?"

Another shake of the head, and a sigh.

"Is there any law in the country? Can the police do nothing?"

"The frontiers are always easily accessible," simpered Jekyl, as he stole a look at his watch.

"Ay, to be sure," broke in Grounsell, indignantly; "the very geography of the Continent assists this profligacy, and five paces over an imaginary boundary gives immunity in a case of murder! Well, Sir, come along with me to the place of meeting. It is just possible that we may be of some service even yet."

"Nothing could be more agreeable to me than the opportunity of cultivating your acquaintance, Doctor Grounsell, but I have already sent off a few lines to Lord Norwood, to apologise for my absence — a previous engagement."

"What! at this hour of the morning, Sir?" burst out Grounsell.

"Even at this early hour, Doctor, our cares commence," said Jekyl, blandly.

"Upon this occasion they must give way to duties, then," said Grounsell, sternly. "The word may sound strangely in your ears, Sir, but I use it advisedly. You have been well received and hospitably entertained by this family. They have shown you many marks of kindness and attention. Now is the opportunity to make some sort of requital. Come, then, and see if this young man cannot be rescued from peril."

"You touch my feelings in the very tenderest spot,"

said Jekyl, softly. "When gratitude is mentioned, I am a child — a mere child."

"Be a man, then, for once, Sir; put on your hat and accompany me," cried Grounsell.

"Would you have me break an appointment, Doctor?"

"Ay, to be sure I would, Sir — at least such an appointment as I suspect yours to be. This may be a case of life or death."

"How very dreadful," said Jekyl, settling his curls at the glass. "Pascal compares men to thin glass phials, with an explosive powder within them, and really one sees the force of the similitude every day; but Jean Paul improves upon it by saying, that we are all burning-glasses of various degrees of density, so that our passions ignite at different grades of heat."

"Mine are not very far from the focal distance at this moment," said Grounsell, with savage energy; "so fetch your hat, Sir, at once, or —"

"Unless I prefer a cap, you were going to add," interposed Jekyl, with a sweet smile.

"We must use speed, Sir, or we shall be too late," rejoined the Doctor.

"I flatter myself few men understand a rapid toilet better," said Jekyl, rising from the table; "so if you'll amuse yourself with Bell's Life, Punch, or Jules Janin, for five minutes, I'm your man."

"I can be company for myself for that space, Sir," said the other, gruffly, and turned to the window, while Jekyl, disappearing behind the drapery that filled the doorway, was heard humming an opera air from within.

Grounsell was in no superlative mood of good

temper with the world, nor would he have extended to the section of it he best knew, the well-known eulogy on the "Bayards." "Swindlers," "Rakes," and "Vagabonds," were about the mildest terms of the vocabulary he kept muttering to himself, while a grumbling thunder-growl of malediction followed each. The very aspect of the little chamber seemed to offer food for his anger: the pretentious style of its decoration jarred and irritated him, and he felt a wish to smash bronzes, and brackets, and statues into one common ruin.

The very visiting-cards which lay scattered over a Sevres dish, offended him; the names of all that were most distinguished in rank and station, with here and there some little civility inscribed on the corner, "Thanks," "Come, if possible," or "Of course we expect you," showing the social request in which Jekyl stood.

"Ay," muttered he to himself, "here is one that can neither give dinners nor balls, get places or pensions, or orders, lend money or lose it, and yet the world wants him, and cannot get on without him. The indolence of profligacy seeks the aid of his stimulating activity, and the palled appetite of sensualism has to borrow the relish from vice that gives all its piquancy. Without him as the fly-wheel, the whole machinery of mischief would stand still. His boast is, that, without a sous, no millionnaire is richer than he; and that every boon of fortune is at his beck. He might add, that in his comprehensive view of wickedness, he realises within himself all the vice of this good capital. I'd send such a fellow to the treadmill — I'd transport him for life — I'd sentence him to hunt

kangaroos for the rest of his days — I'd —" He stopped short in his violent tirade, for he suddenly bethought him how he himself was at that very moment seeking aid and assistance at his hands, and somewhat abashed by the recollection, he called out, "Mr. Jekyl, are you ready yet?"

No answer was returned to this question, and Grounsell repeated it in a louder voice. All was silent, and not even the dulcet sounds of the air from "Lucia" broke the stillness; and now, the Doctor losing all patience, drew aside the curtain and looked in. The chamber was empty, and Jekyl was gone! His little portmanteau, and his still smaller carpet-bag, his hatcase, his canes — every article of his *personnel*, were away; and while Grounsell stood cursing the "little rascal," he himself was pleasantly seated opposite Lady Hester and Kate in the travelling-carriage, and convulsing them with laughter at his admirable imitation of the poor Doctor.

Great as was Grounsell's anger at this trickery, it was still greater when he discovered that he had been locked in. He quite forgot the course of time passed in his meditations, and could not believe it possible that there was sufficient interval to have effected all these arrangements so speedily.

Too indignant to brook delay, he dashed his foot through the door, and passed out. The noise at once summoned the people of the house to the spot, and, to Grounsell's surprise, with a police officer amongst them, who, in all the pomp of office, now barred the passage with a drawn sword.

"What is it — what's this?" cried he, in astonishment.

"Effraction by force in case of debt is punishable by the 127th section of the 'Code,'" said a dirty little man, who, with the air of a shoe-black, was still a leading member of the Florence "Bar."

"I owe nothing here — not a farthing, Sir; let me pass," cried Grounsell.

"'Fathers for sons of nonage or over that period, domiciliated in the same house,'" began the advocate, reading out of a volume in his hand, "are also responsible."

"What balderdash, Sir; I have no son; I never was married in my life; and as for this Mr. Jekyl, if you mean to father him on me, I'll resist to the last drop of my blood."

"Denunciation and menace, with show of arms, or without," began the lawyer again, "are punishable by fine and imprisonment."

Grounsell was now so worked up by fury, that he attempted to force a passage by main strength; but a general brandishing of knives by all the family, from seven years of age upwards, warned him that the attempt might be too serious, while a wild chorus of abusive language arose from various sympathisers who poured in from the street to witness the scene.

A father who would not pay for his own son! an "assassin," who had no bowels for his kindred; a "Birbante," a "Briccone," and a dozen similar epithets, rattled on him like hail, till Grounsell, supposing that the "bite" might be in proportion to the "bark," retreated into a small chamber, and proposed terms of accommodation. Few men take pleasure in acquitting their own debts, fewer still like to pay those of their neighbours, and Grounsell set about the task in anything but a

pleasant manner. There was one redeeming feature, however, in the affair. Jekyl's schedule could not have extracted a rebuke from the severest Commissioner of Bankruptcy. His household charges were framed on the most moderate scale of expenditure. A few crowns for his house rent, a few "Pauls" for his eatables, and a few "Grazie" for his washing, comprised the whole charge of his establishment, and not even Hume would have sought to cut down the "estimates." Doubtless, more than one-half of the demands were unjust and extortionate, and many were perhaps already acquitted; but as all the rogueries were but homœopathic iniquities after all, their doses might be endured with patience. His haste to conclude the arrangements had, however, a very opposite tendency. The more yielding he became the greater grew their exactions, and several times the treaty threatened to open hostilities again; and at last it was full an hour after Jekyl's departure that Grounsell escaped from durance, and was free to follow George Onslow to Pratolino.

With his adventures in the interval the reader is sufficiently acquainted; and we now come back to that moment where, bewildered and lost, he sat down upon the bench beside the high road.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"A Sad Household."

It was already past noon when Grounsell reached Florence. He was delayed at the gate by the authorities examining a peasant's cart in front of him — a process which appeared to take a most unusual degree of care and scrutiny — and thus gave the Doctor another occasion for inveighing against the "stupid ignorance of foreigners, who throw every possible impediment in the way of traffic and intercourse."

"What have they discovered now?" cried he, testily, as in a crowd of vehicles, of all sorts and sizes, he was jammed up like a coal vessel in the river. "Is the peasant a revolutionary General in disguise? or has he got Bibles, or British cutlery, under the straw of his baroccino?"

"No, Eccelenza." (Every one in a passion in Italy is styled Eccelenza, as an "anodyne.") "It's a sick man, and they don't know what to do with him."

"Is there a duty on ague or nervous fever?" asked he, angrily.

"They suspect he's dead, Eccelenza, and, if so, there's no use in bringing him into the city, to bring him out again by-and-by."

"And don't they know if a man be dead or alive?"

"Not when he's a foreigner, Illustrissimo; and such is the case here."

"Ah! very true," said Grounsell, dryly, as if acquiescing in the truth of the remark. "Let me have a look at him; perhaps I can assist their judgment." And with this he descended, and made his way through the crowd, who, in all the eagerness of curiosity, thronged around the cart. A peasant's great coat was drawn over the figure, and even the face of the sick man, as he lay at full length on the mat flooring of the barocino; and on his chest some pious hand had deposited a rosary and a wooden crucifix.

Grounsell hastily drew back the covering, and then clutching an arm of those at either side of him, he uttered a faint cry, for the pale and deathlike features before him, were those of George Onslow. The instincts of the Doctor, however, soon rose above every other feeling, and his hand seized the wrist and felt for the pulse. Its beatings were slow, laboured, and irregular, denoting the brain as the seat of injury. Grounsell, therefore, proceeded to examine the head, which, covered with clogged and matted blood, presented a terrific appearance; yet neither there nor elsewhere was there any trace of injury by fire-arms. The history of discovery was soon told. A shepherd had detected the body as he passed the spot, and hailing some peasants on their way to Florence, advised their taking charge of it to the city, where they would be surely recompensed. The natural suggestion of Grounsell's mind was, that, in making his escape

from the Gendarmes, Onslow had fallen over a cliff. To convey him home, and get him to bed, if possible, before Sir Stafford should hear of the misfortune, was his first care; and in this he succeeded. It was the time when Sir Stafford usually slept; and Grounsell was able to examine his patient, and satisfy himself that no fatal injury was done, long before the old Baronet awoke.

"Sir Stafford wishes to see you, Sir; he has asked for you repeatedly to-day," said Proctor.

"Has he heard — does he know anything of this?" said Grounsell, with a gesture to the bed where George lay.

"Not a word, Sir. He was very cheerful all the morning, but wondering where you could have gone, and what Mister George was doing."

"Now for it, then," muttered Grounsell to himself, as, with clasped hands and knitted brows, he walked along; his mind suffering the very same anxieties as had oftentimes beset him on the eve of some painful operation in his art.

"Well, Grounsell," said the old man, with a smile, as he entered, "is it to give me a foretaste of my altered condition that you all desert me to-day? You have never come near me, nor George either, so far as I can learn."

"We've had a busy morning of it, Stafford," said the Doctor, sitting down on the bed, and laying his finger on the pulse. "You are better — much better to-day. Your hand is like itself, and your eye is free from fever."

"I feel it, Grounsell. I feel as if, with some twenty years less upon my back, I could like to begin my tussle with the world, and try issue with the best."

"You 're young enough, and active enough yet, for what is before you, Stafford. Yesterday I told you of everything in colours perhaps gloomier than reality. The papers of to-day are somewhat more cheery in their tidings. The hurricane may pass over, and leave us still afloat; but there is another trial for you, my old friend, and you must take heart to bear it well and manfully."

Sir Stafford sat up in his bed, and, grasping Grounsell by either shoulder, cried out, "Go on — tell it quickly."

"Be calm, Stafford; be yourself, my old friend," said Grounsell, terrified at the degree of emotion he had called up. "Your own courageous spirit will not desert you now."

"I know it," said the old man, as, relaxing his grasp, he fell back upon the pillow, and then, turning on his face, he uttered a deep groan. "I know your tidings, now," cried he, in a burst of agony! "Oh, Grounsell, what is all other disgrace compared to this!"

"I am speaking of George — of your son," interposed Grounsell, hastily, and seizing with avidity the opportunity to reveal all at once. "He left this for Pratolino this morning to fight a duel, but by some mischance has fallen over a cliff, and is severely injured."

"He 's dead — you would tell me he 's dead!" said the old man, in a faint, thrilling whisper.

"Far from it. Alive, and like to live, but still sorely crushed and wounded."

"Oh God!" cried the old man, in a burst of emotion, "what worldliness is in my heart, when I am thankful for such tidings as this! When it is a relief to me to know that my child, my only son, lies maimed and broken on a sick bed, instead of — instead of —" A gush of tears here broke in upon his utterance, and he wept bitterly.

Grounsell knew too well the relief such paroxysms afford to interfere with its course, while, to avoid any recurrence even in thought to the cause, he hurriedly told all that he knew of George's intended meeting with the Frenchman, and his own share in disturbing the rendezvous.

Sir Stafford never spoke during this recital. The terrible shock seemed to have left its stunning influence on his faculties, and he appeared scarcely able to take in with clearness the details into which the other entered.

"She's gone to Como, then," were the first words he uttered. "To this villa the Prince has lent her."

"So I understand; and, from what Proctor says, the Russian is going to marry the Dalton girl."

"Miss Dalton is along with Lady Hester?"

"To be sure; they travel together, and George was to have followed them."

"Even scandal, Grounsell, can make nothing of this. What say you, man?"

"You may defy it on that score, Stafford; but let us talk of what is more imminent — of George."

"I must see him, Grounsell; I must see my poor boy," said he, rising and making an effort to get out of bed; but weakness and mental excitement together overcame him, and he sank back again, fainting and exhausted. To this a deep, heavy sleep succeeded, and Grounsell stole away, relieved in mind, by having acquitted himself of his painful task, and free to address his thoughts to other cares.

"Lord Norwood wishes to see you, Sir," said a servant to the Doctor, as he at last seated himself for a moment's rest in his chamber; and before Grounsell could reply the noble Viscount entered.

"Excuse this abrupt visit, Sir; but I have just heard of poor Onslow's accident. Is there any danger in his condition?"

"Great and imminent danger, my Lord."

"By Jove! — sorry for it. You don't happen to know how it occurred."

"A fall evidently was the cause, but how incurred I cannot even guess."

"In the event of his coming about again, when might we expect to see him all right? — speaking loosely, of course."

"Should he recover, it will take a month, or perhaps two, before he convalesces."

"The devil it will! These Frenchmen can't be made to understand the thing at all; and as Guilmard received a gross personal outrage, he is perfectly out of his mind at the dealy in obtaining satisfaction. What is to be done?"

"I am a poor adviser in such cases, my Lord; nor

do I see that the matter demands any attention from us whatever."

"Not from *you*, perhaps," said Norwood, insolently; "but I had the misfortune to go out as his friend! My position is a most painful and critical one."

"I should suppose that no one will understand how to deal with such embarrassments better than your Lordship."

"Thanks for the good opinion; the speech I take to be a compliment, however you meant it. I believe I am not altogether unskilled in such affairs, and it is precisely because such is the case that I am here now. Onslow, in other hands than mine, is a ruined man. The story, tell it how you will, comes to this: that, having gone out to meet a man he had grossly insulted, he wanders away from the rendezvous, and is found some hours after at the foot of a cliff, insensible. He may have fallen — he may have been waylaid — though everything controverts this notion; or, lastly, he may have done the act himself. There will be advocates for each view of the case; but it is essential, for his honour and reputation, that one story should be authenticated. Now, I am quite ready to stand godfather to such a version, taking all the consequences, however serious, on myself."

"This is very kind — very generous indeed, my Lord," said Grounsell, suddenly warming into an admiration of one he was always prejudiced against.

"Oh, I'm a regular John Bull!" said the Viscount, at once assuming the burden of that canticle, which helped him in all moments of hypocrisy. "Always stand by the old stock — nothing like them, Sir.

The Anglo-Saxon blood will carry all before it yet; never suffer a rascally foreigner to put his foot on one of your countrymen. Have him out, Sir; parade the fellow at once: that's my plan."

"I like your spirit!" cried Grounsell, enthusiastically.

"To be sure you do, old cock," exclaimed Norwood, clapping him familiarly on the shoulder. "Depend upon it, *I'll* pull George through this. *I'll* manage the matter cleverly. There must be no mistake about it — no room for doubt or equivocation, you know. All straightforward, open, and manly: John Bull every inch of it. That's *my* notion, at least — I hope it's yours?"

"Perfectly — thoroughly so!"

"Well, then, just hand that note to Sir Stafford." — Here he placed a sealed letter in Grounsell's hand. — "Tell him what I've just told you. Let him fairly understand the whole question, and let me have the contents this evening at the *café* in the Santa Trinita — say about nine o'clock; not later than that. These fellows always gather about that hour."

"I'll take care of it," said Grounsell.

"All right!" cried Norwood, gaily, as he arose and adjusted the curls beneath his hat. "My compliments to the old gent, and tell George not to make himself uneasy. He's in safe hands. Good-by!"

"Good-by, my Lord, good-by," said Grounsell, who, as he looked after him, felt, as it were, unconsciously recurring to all his former prejudices and dislikes of the noble Viscount. "Those fellows," muttered he, "are as inexplicable to me as a new malady, of

which I neither know the stages nor the symptoms! The signs I take for those of health, may be precisely the indications of corruption; and what I deem unsound, may turn out to be exactly the opposite." And so he fell into a musing fit, in which certainly his estimate of Lord Norwood continued steadily to fall lower and lower the longer he thought of him. "He must be a rogue! — he must be a scoundrel! Nature makes all its blackguards plausible, just as poison-berries are always brilliant to look at. They are both intended to be the correctives of rash impressions, and I was only a fool ever to be deceived by him. Out of this, at all hazards — that's the first thing!" muttered Grounsell to himself, as he walked hastily up and down the room. "The place is like a plague district, and we must not carry an infected rag away from it! Glorious Italy, forsooth! There's more true enlightenment — there's a higher purpose, and a nobler view of life, in the humblest English village, than in the proudest halls of their Eternal City!"

In such pleasant reflections on national character he entered Sir Stafford's room, and found his friend seated at a table covered with newly-arrived letters; the seals were all unbroken, and the sick man was turning them over, and gazing at the different handwritings with a sad and listless apathy.

"I'm glad you've come, Grounsell. I have not courage for this," said he, pointing to the mass of letters before him.

"Begging impostors, one half of them, I'll be sworn!" said Grounsell, seating himself to the work. "Was I not right? Here's a Cabinet Minister suing

for your vote on an Irish question, and entreating your speedy return to England, 'where, he trusts, the object you are both interested in may be satisfactorily arranged.' Evasive rascal! Couldn't he say, 'You shall have the Peerage for your support.' Wouldn't it be more frank, and more intelligible, to declare, 'We take you at your price!' These," said he, throwing half a dozen contemptuously from him, "are all from your constituents. The 'independent borough' contains seventy electors, and, if you owned the patronage of the two services, with a fair share of the public offices and India, you couldn't content them. I 'd tell them, fairly, 'I have bought you already; the article is paid for and sent home. Let us hear no more about it!' This is more cheering. Shoenhals of Riga stands firm, and the Rotterdam house will weather the gale. That 's good news, Onslow?" said he, grasping the old man's hand. "This is from Calcutta. Prospects are brightening a little in that quarter, too. Come, come — there 's some blue in the sky. Who knows what good weather 's in store for us?"

Onslow's lip trembled, and he passed his hand over his eyes without speaking.

"This is from Como," said Grounsell, half angrily, tossing away a highly-perfumed little three-cornered note.

"Give it to me — let me see it," said Onslow, eagerly, while, with trembling fingers, he adjusted his spectacles to read. Grounsell handed him the epistle, and walked to the window.

"She 's quite well," read Sir Stafford, aloud; "they had delightful weather on the road, and found Como in full beauty on their arrival." Grounsell grumbled

some angry mutterings between his teeth, and shrugged up his shoulders disdainfully. "She inquires most kindly after me, and wishes me to join them, there, for Kate Dalton's betrothal."

"Yet she never took the trouble to visit you when living under the same roof!" cried Grounsell, indignantly.

The old man laid down the letter, and seemed to ponder for some moments.

"What's the amount? — how much is the sum?" asked Grounsell, bluntly.

"The amount! — the sum! — of what?" inquired Sir Stafford.

"I ask, what demand is she making that it is prefaced thus?"

"By Heaven! if you were not a friend of more than fifty years' standing, you should never address me as such again," cried Onslow, passionately. "Has ill-nature so absorbed your faculties that you have not a good thought or good feeling left you?"

"My stock of them decreases every day — aye, every hour, Onslow," said he, with a deeper emotion than he had yet displayed. "It is, indeed, a sorry compromise, that if age is to make us wiser, it should make us less amiable also!"

"You are not angry with me? — not offended, Grounsell?" said Onslow, grasping his hand in both his own.

"Not a bit of it. But, as to temperament, *I* can no more help *my* distrust, than *you* can conquer *your* credulity, which is a happier philosophy, after all."

"Then come, read that letter, Grounsell," said Onslow, smiling pleasantly; "put your prejudices aside for once, and be just, if not generous."

Grounsell took the note, and walked to the window to read it. The note was just what he expected — a prettily-turned inquiry after her husband's health, interwoven with various little pleasantries of travelling, incidents of the road, and so forth. The invitation was a mere suggestion, and Grounsell was half angry at how little there was to find fault with; for, even to the "Very sincerely yours, Hester Onslow," all was as commonplace as need be. Accidentally turning over the page, however, he found a small slip of silver paper — a bank cheque for five hundred pounds, only wanting Onslow's signature. Grounsell crushed it convulsively in his palm, and handed the note back to Onslow, without a word.

"Well, are you convinced? — are you satisfied now?" asked Onslow, triumphantly.

"I am perfectly so!" said Grounsell, with a deep sigh. "You must write, and tell her that business requires your immediate presence in England, and that George's condition will necessitate a return by sea. Caution her that the Daltons should be consulted about this marriage — which, so far as I know, they have not been; and I would advise, also, seeing that there may be some interval before you can write again, that you should send her a cheque, — say for five hundred pounds."

"So you *can* be equitable, Grounsell," cried the other, joyously.

"And here is a letter from Lord Norwood," said Grounsell, not heeding the remark, and breaking the

seal as he spoke. "Laconic, certainly. 'Let me have the enclosed by this evening. — N.' The enclosed are five acceptances for two hundred each; the 'value received' being his Lordship's services in upholding your son's honour. Now, here, at least, Onslow, I'll have my own way." And, with these words, he seated himself at a table, and wrote:

"My Lord, — Living in a land where assassination is cheap, and even men of small fortune can keep a Bravo, I beg to return your Lordship's bills, without submitting them to my friend for indorsement, your price being considerably above the tariff of the country, and more calculated to your own exigencies than the occasion which it was meant to remunerate. — I am, yours,

"Paul Grounsell."

"What have you said there, Grounsell? You look so self-satisfied, it can scarcely be over civil."

"There — 'To the Viscount Norwood,'" said Grounsell, as he sealed and addressed the note. "We are getting through our work rapidly. In a week, or even less, if George's symptoms show nothing worse, we shall get away from this; and even on the sea one feels half as though it were England."

We need not follow Grounsell through the busy days which ensued, nor track him in his various negotiations with tradespeople, bankers, house-agents, and that legionary class which are called "Commissionnaires;" enough if we say, that, in arranging for the departure of his friends, his impressions of Italian roguery received many an additional confirmation; and

that, when the last day of their sojourn arrived, his firm conviction was that none but a millionnaire could afford to live in this the very cheapest capital of Europe!

And now they are gone! steaming calmly away across the Gulf of Genoa. They have closed the little episode of their life in Italy, and, with heavy hearts, are turning homeward. The great Mazzarini Palace looks sad and forlorn, nor do we mean to linger much longer on a scene whence the actors have departed.

END OF VOL. II.

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